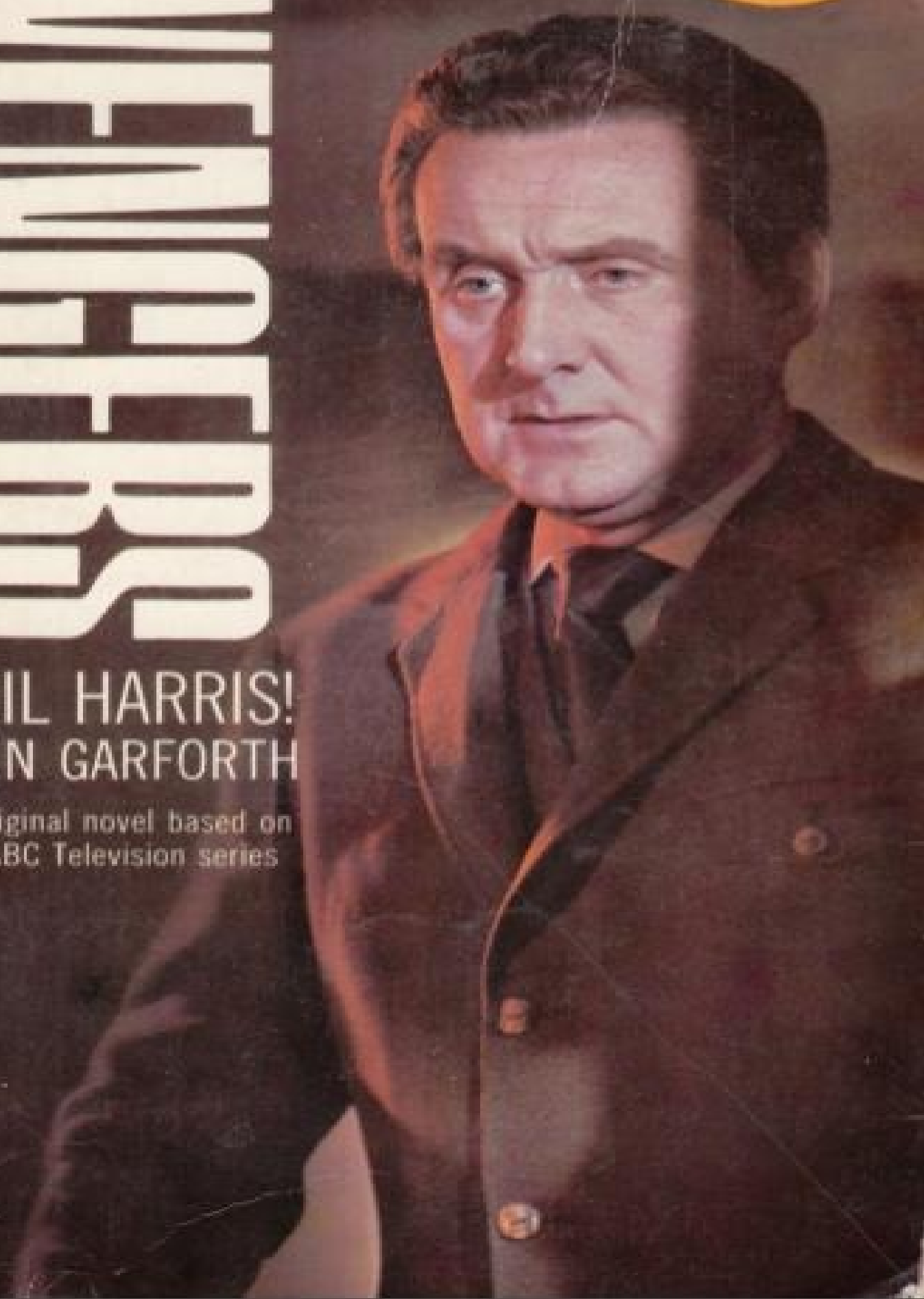


Panther
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THE HUNGERS

HEIL HARRIS!
JOHN GARFORTH

An original novel based on
the ABC Television series



AVENGERS

HEIL HARRIS

JOHN GARFORTH

Heil Harris!

A Panther Book

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1

Here comes Rousseau

"I first met Adolf Hitler when I was a young captain in 1945. He was dead. M.I.5 had wanted a man in Berlin when the Russian army battered its way into the ruined city. Himmler and Goering had already sued for peace, but the Allies were set on destroying Germany once and for all." Steed looked at the phrase once and for all, then crossed it out. "I arrived in Berlin on the morning of April 30th in time to witness Hitler's final act of vengeance carried out by the S.S. - the flooding of the Bundesbahn. It was an act of vengeance against his own people and I watched in dismay." Horror? Aghast? "I watched in indescribable amazement. If a man could do this to his own people then the barbarity of the Russian soldiers was humane and the concentration camp I had seen a week earlier at Belsen was just. War was manly and the world was insane. Hitler was only a statesman doing his job."

Steed lit a panatella and sighed. He went into the kitchen to put on some more coffee. Then he strolled back into the study, paused by the latticed windows and stared through the evening mist at the willows in bloom by the river. He didn't see the point in writing all this down. It had taken him three weeks to reach the end of the war, and when it was all finished he'd have to go through and put in some graphs and footnotes to make it a scholarly work. Think up phrases like 'as Stalin was to Hitler so Churchill was to Peter Kavanagh'. The midnight clatter of jackboots in the empty streets still reverberates through the corridors of history. And there would have to be an academic joke; 'Hitler's indecision exists only in the mind of A.J.P. Taylor'; that would make two professors chuckle and surprise the other seventeen readers. Oh yes, there was an art in writing history!

"The first Russian troops entered Hitler's bunker three days later and they found the bodies of not one Hitler but three. Hence the continuing mystery concerning - no, about - the actual remains. The Germans claimed that he died fighting at the head of his troops and the Russians claimed that his body was burned to ashes with that of his wife. What we really have is a triple certainty that he did die...."

There was something too remote about Berlin at the end of the war. This Elizabethan cottage in Wiltshire twenty-one years later was real, this

convalescence was necessary. But the past was past. He had reached the moral bit now: Hitler was the responsibility of us all, a symptom of the malaise at the heart of Europe. Or the cautionary bit: we must remember that democracy is our only safeguard against a mad tyrant again seizing the helm. Perhaps a personal touch: I myself could never take to the fellow, he lacked refinement.

When Steed had been knocked about and brainwashed a month ago the doctors had ordered a rest. He had been given treatment that took him back mentally to the condition of a child, which had been easily cured. They stopped the treatment. But His Nibs had developed another of his theories. "What you need, Steed m'boy, is to work your way intellectually through to the present. Put your life into a semblance of order by writing down the facts and sorting out the patterns."

"I think the boom for war memoirs is over, sir -"

"It's a spy boom now, Steed. Dammit, you must have done something during those years with M.I.5."

Steed had smiled. 'I did meet a very nice girl during the liberation of Paris. But she turned out to be a spy.'

"Well, there you are. Best seller. Did she sing in a night club? Just bear in mind that when the film comes out she'll be played by Marlene Deitrich."

The old man had meant well. He knew that Steed enjoyed being idle and so he had tried to suggest something that would keep him occupied. Trouble was that Steed found himself emerging from the page as such an intrepidly heroic figure that no male actor would have the panache to play him. Which was immodest. With reference to the Germans, he wrote deliberately, as far as the British were concerned, John Steed... and he paused to work in the phrase 'theatre of operations'. Or as it's known in hospitals, operating theatre.

To hell with it!

One of the reasons Steed hadn't written two volumes by now and reached the year 1970 was that he needed a couple of double brandies to make such an effort, and after a couple of double brandies he found himself sitting back in his chair reflecting on destiny, history, grammar, and the insignificance of man. Even Hitler had spoken in clichés. Would any serious novelist have got away with 'Never... has so much been owed by so many to so few'? Style! It was like the wit of the Prime Minister. The thing is not done well, as somebody once said, but you are surprised to find it done at all.

Steed decided to write another paragraph tomorrow.

It was half past nine, he had run out of brandy, and if man was as insignificant as all that he might as well take a healthy walk down to the village pub and listen to the local farmers talking about their crops and the recurring

seasons. They talked in genuine Mummerset accents down at the George & Dragon, all except Snowy Black-Hawkins who owned the place.

He walked slowly along the narrow lane (Karsten's Lane they called it locally, after the famous accident), smelling the fresh rain on the birch trees and relishing the absolute darkness of the countryside. There was none of that glow that you get in London; no street lamps, no office blocks or cars. He decided that statesmen must love not their country but history.

"Hello, here comes Rousseau. Evening, Steed. How are the scandalous confessions today?" Snowy had a sense of humour; his other joke was that Steed was recording how he won the war single-handed. "Did you tell them how we went down into Hitler's bunker?"

"Yes." Steed raised his glass to the good old days.

"Creepy place," Black-Hawkins explained to the yokels. "Like a bloody underground hotel, all concrete and damp. No wonder Adolf was going senile!"

The George & Dragon was an authentic country pub, with none of the brass and oak beam comfort that the advertisements insist on. It had seven tiny bare rooms arranged round the bar, and the bar was a huge stone kitchen. Snowy Black-Hawkins had bought the place when he retired from Military Intelligence eight years ago, and he had done his best to attract the Jaguar trade; he had put a fireplace in the saloon bar, persuaded the Wiltshire captain to use it for a 'pop into your local' advert on television. But to Steed's relief the pub was not a magnet for the surrounding county. The only time it made a profit was when the hunt met outside on the green. The profit would be larger if Snowy could keep silent about bloody-stockbrokers-reverting-to-savagery. Five farmers were in tonight, complaining about the lack of rain, and an old lady in the corner was drinking cider.

"I reckon we wasted our time," said Snowy. He thrust back his shoulders and barked like an old soldier. "Eight years of my life I spent fighting Jerry, two of them behind the lines and two of them in Berlin before the party started. So did you, Steed. (Ay, so I did.) And what happens? The devils are at it again."

"Ay, so they are." They had had this conversation several times before, but there was nothing much else to talk about. They were old friends. It was better than the argument over British youth being soft today. "Did you read what von Thadden said last week? He said Germany has no aggressive intentions towards the rest of Europe; he only wants back the territories stolen from it during the last war."

"By God, it's all so damned familiar!" Snowy thumped the bar in disgust. "Is he the fellow who married an English debutante?"

"No. That was Baron von Thalmann."

"They always harp on about the territories they used to possess, and communism and Africa and the Jews. Emotional blah! That's what was wrong with Hitler - behind all his emotion and his bogeymen he had no positive ideology." Which was a pretty deep observation for Snowy, so he nodded impressively for the next few minutes and joined Steed in a brandy. "Frivolous, that's what Jerry is. I mean, who'd want to marry an English debutante?"

"That was Baron von Thalmann."

"They're all the bloody same. I didn't like the country; the beer was bad and they were sexually repressed."

"Down with the N.P.D.," said Steed.

"*Gesundheit!*"

They drank solemnly to the laying of ghosts.

Sixty minutes later Steed was strolling cheerfully back along the dark lane. He felt more optimistic now about Germany. They were on our side anyway. And a lot can change in twenty years. Steed, he said to himself, it's that first quarter century of anti-kraut propaganda still lurking in the old bosom. Hitler was dead. It didn't matter whether he was a genius or a madman or a politician who took the game seriously. This was Wiltshire. If he knew how to look he might see a badger searching for food in the hedgerow or a kingfisher swooping across the river. A thousand eyes might be staring at him, malevolent ferrets, suspicious moles, German secret service men reliving the triumph of 1934 when according to local legend they had killed a famous Nazi on this road.

Steed paused by the roadside; nature might be wonderful but at times it could be inconvenient. He stepped over the ditch, went through the trees and selected a large oak. Carefully avoided a nest of toadstools. Whistled a patriotic air. Yes, that was better.

Ernst Karsten had been a high-up member of the Nazi movement until June 30th, 1934. Then he had arrived in England, fleeing from the bloodbath that was ridding Hitler of his enemies. But a fortnight later Karsten was killed on his motor-cycle. The night of the long knives had caught up with him.

The ferns crackled as Steed pushed his way back to the lane. His step on the springy gorse was utterly silent. And when he reached the verge he stopped. In the distance he could hear a motor-cycle approaching. Too fast, too noisily, ridden by a maniac who enjoyed the thrill of speed. Slow down, Steed murmured, you'll kill yourself. He could see shadows further along the ditch, reduced suddenly to sinister silhouettes as the harsh headlamp reached out like an antenna and then swerved round on to the lane ahead.

The shadows moved nervously. English types; in 1934 one didn't get excited. One did the job and felt proud of being British. Reminds me, the first one was

saying, of that Easter before I went to Eton. Miss Prism took me for a picnic on the downs and I met the pater. I'll never forget that Easter. Pater scored a century for the village side against the blacksmith's eleven.

The motor-bike roared past and then screamed hideously at the sharp bend in the lane; there were sparks as metal scraped the macadam surface of the road, a scream of terror and the deafening crunch of dead metal. Then silence.

When Steed reached the tangle of metal he found a front wheel still spinning aimlessly. But it was another ten minutes before he found the rider. There was blood dripping down the side of the tree, and the despatch rider was seven feet high with his spine wrapped round a drooping bough.

The ambulance arrived nearly half an hour later and the police were only a few minutes before it. Steed waited nervously till they came. He felt almost responsible for the man's death. He had been so preoccupied with the past, with the war and Ernst Karsten, that it seemed as if he had involved the despatch rider in his fantasy. He wandered over to the shadowy figures by the hedge and found predictably they were cows. So why had the man on the motor-cycle been real? Steed went through his wallet and found that his name was Sergeant Alfred Wilkes. Based at Swindon. A member of the Werewolf organisation. There was a photograph in the flap of a sharply pretty girl who signed herself 'Mary, for ever.'

A mundane little tragedy. Steed sat on the fence by the curve in the road and looked out for the ambulance. Ernst Karsten had joined the national socialist party because he was a socialist. There had been a lot of them in the northern branch of the organisation. But when Hitler found it necessary to placate the industrialists he had had the socialists eliminated. Karsten should have fled to Russia.

"Sergeant Wilkes was one of our best men, but he was bound to kill himself eventually. He *would* stand on the pillion at eighty miles an hour." Colonel Hayburn was a bland man whom Steed had known briefly at Sandhurst. "We try to encourage these high-spirited lads here at Swindon. Nerve, and the spirit of adventure. The trouble with most kids we get today is that they look on the army as a secure job with a pension at the end of it. The thrill of battle is rare and the pride of manhood is meaningless to them."

Steed had heard the theory before and he hadn't travelled twenty miles to hear it again. He muttered something about cold baths and waited for the man to reach the point.

"Wilkes might have been going anywhere," said the colonel, "or he might have been coming back. Why does it matter to you?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I'm squeamish about road accidents." Steed accepted a cigar and wondered how to explain that he was merely being superstitious. "I was standing at the scene of the accident before he turned the corner, and I was thinking about Ernst Karsten's death on precisely the same spot thirty years ago. It seems such a coincidence that I had to have a chat with someone..."

"No coincidence," said Colonel Hayburn. "You must have heard the motorcycle three minutes before it reached you, and that would explain why you were thinking about Karsten's death. I don't believe in coincidence."

"Neither do I." The cigar was slightly dry, rolled on the thigh of an older woman, but it passed with the large whisky that Hayburn produced. "What is a Werewolf?"

"I've no idea."

He might as well have stayed at home and written some more of his memoirs. Then he would be able to forget about the past. He stayed with Hayburn for a few more minutes, remembering the days when the army had made a man of you, and then emerged into the fresh air of Swindon. Steed hated the barracks mentality, with its austere insistence on physical fitness, discipline and stupidity. Even the officers were retarded adolescents who had mentally never left Borstal.

Steed bought an evening paper before climbing into his Speed Six Bentley and chugging comfortably back into the countryside. Maybe he'd have tea with the vicar to recreate the feeling of being civilised, or perhaps he'd ask that damned schoolmaster about the imperfect subjunctive. What kind of man can prefer the crude male companionship that Hayburn was trying to inculcate? Of course, the fellow had gained a dubious reputation at Sandhurst, constantly lurking round the showers and all that wrestling, then being beaten up by his sister. Steed relaxed gradually as the factory chimneys receded on the horizon.

Ernst Karsten had also enjoyed barrack room company. He had been a founder member of the Brownshirts and a friend of Roehme.

Hell! He was still chewing over the same old ideas, the product of an idle mind. Steed decided to stop off for an early supper at Percy Crabbe's place on the A.4. He would have some of that *lasagne al forno Piemontese*. It would give him an interest in life. And a bottle of 1947 Barolo to heighten the perception. There was nothing to equal an Italian meal done by Percy Crabbe; every detail was authentic, even the washing up was done by a real Italian woman.

Steed pushed through the swing doors into the heavy oak dining-room and waved to Percy. "No," he said, "I'm not altogether blooming today. I've been wielding a bloody pen and I think it must have shattered the nerves."

Percy recommended a good meal.

"Yes, but I'll sit here and admire the view first. A fine Napoleon brandy will

restore whatever needs to be restored."

But it didn't. He stared across the valley until a waiter brought the brandy, and then he sat back to read the evening paper. "Swindon synagogue attacked with burning cross," proclaimed the headlines. Underneath was the full story of daubed swastikas and anti-semitic slogans. *Juden Raus*. There was no escaping from the Third Reich.

2

"I know I'm not attractive"

"I know I'm not attractive," said Frankenstein's monster, "but I was made this way."

The Werewolf looked at him distastefully. "You should change your religion, old man. If you don't like your maker you can always change him."

"Would that help?"

"Not really, but it would give you something else to think about. I mean, look at Lucrezia Borgia, she's a different woman since she became a scientologist. A year ago she'd never have fallen off her horse as she did this afternoon." The Werewolf grabbed two whiskies from a passing flunkey. "I say, what will you do when the lights go out?"

"I expect I'll die," said the monster. "I can't bear these orgies."

Emma Peel stood behind them wondering what sort of friends she had, or what sort of friends her friends had. Two hundred people in a stateroom enjoying themselves, in fashionable conversation and caucus races. She wished Steed hadn't insisted she come all this way out from London just to kill a fox.

(But Steed, she'd argued, you know I don't like the Throgmortons. I wouldn't have mentioned their invitation.... I'm sorry, Mrs. Peel, but there's something in the air. What? I haven't the slightest idea.)

The young man in an S.S. uniform came up to her again. "Are you Emma Peel?" he asked.

"I'm meant to be Dick Turpin."

"I gather you're a sort of secret agent."

"I'm a highwayman." She sighed and decided she would have to be friendly. Stormtroopers can be unpleasant. "What are you?"

"I'm a Jew."

As a joke it was in pretty poor taste, but it was that kind of party. "So why are you dressed as an S.S. man?"

"Why are you dressed as a highwayman?"

"I happened to be wearing this outfit when I arrived in Berniston this morning." Rather becoming, the jacket in emerald green corduroy and the thigh boots in emerald green suedette, with the black gloves and hipster belt providing dramatic contrast. She had worn it for the hunt.

"I'd rather be an S.S. man, but it takes more than a change of clothes to switch sides after two thousand years. Will you help me?"

"I'm not a secret agent." The music was dull. Bad Beatlemusic. The county people were catching up with out-of-date trends as usual and doing it badly. Among the revellers there was even a dentist dressed up as Batman, and as the drink flowed he became embarrassing in his hunt for a Robin. "I went to school with the daughter of the M.F.H. and I'm here for the weekend. I'm not a spy on the job."

It's so much more fun, Cynthia Throgmorton had said, now that the barriers have broken down. Rock and roll and all kinds of people one didn't meet when the county families stuck together. Yes, David Simmons was a Jew and that fellow dressed as Peter Pan went to the local grammar school. Wasn't it clever to do away with those awful hunt balls and have a fun party instead?

"Of course Ralph's a circuit judge now," Bugs Bunny was saying, "so he couldn't come tonight. I asked him to come as the public hangman. He was furious."

"He could always have come as a judge."

"All right," said David Simmons, defeated, "if you won't help me, perhaps you'll dance with me?"

"I'd love to."

The trouble with hunt balls is that there are too many people trying too hard to talk to the right people; too few attractive women, too few attractive men; too many people who've come to prove that they've bought their way in; too many people who are impressed by so much money. The trouble with hunt balls was that Emma didn't enjoy them.

"Who told you I'm a spy?" Emma asked.

"Cynthia Throgmorton. She knows all kinds of people -"

"I've heard about them. What sort of help were you wanting?"

David Simmons was a thin, athletic type with eager, darting eyes. If he weren't so worried he'd be very attractive. Middle twenties, a barrister by profession and radiating nervous energy. She took his hand and led him from the ballroom on to one of those verandas where people drink coffee, smoke cigars and eat After Eights. It was a warm, romantic evening. She sat David Simmons in a wrought iron chair and told him to relax.

"I'm sorry to be melodramatic," he said after lighting a cigarette with sharp, jerky movements. "It must be all those people in disguise. For the past few hours I've felt myself absolutely surrounded by hostile faces. An atmosphere of menace -"

"Have you tried a stiff brandy? I know lots of those people, and more law-

abiding creatures you couldn't imagine. They can't even kill a small fox unless there are twenty-five of them." She laughed reassuringly. "And don't be taken in by the noise - it's making them nervous as well."

"It's like the 1930s all over again," said David Simmons. "The swastikas and the stigma -"

"You weren't alive in 1930." She waved to a footman and took two drinks, a Campari and a stiff brandy. It had come to something when she was mothering a young man of approximately her own age and being forced into the role of a spy. She felt almost pompous. Well, yes, she had given Steed a bit of help when he'd needed it, she'd thrown a few characters over her graceful shoulders and come pretty close to a grisly death, but to be asked to a fancy dress ball as Emma Peel the well-known spy.... I'm a woman of 28 with auburn hair, green eyes and a figure like a fashion model: slightly slimmer than the Venus de Milo but done in a nicer pink. I'm beautiful. "I don't like fancy dress balls myself," she reflected. "They're so unnecessary."

"They help to create an atmosphere of unreality," he muttered. "You need such an atmosphere for burning human torches, for rape or racial warfare. You can call yourself a Werewolf and all things become possible. It's like making an anonymous phone call at midnight - you can tell somebody not to go to the Throgmortons' hunt ball if it's dark, you can call somebody a kike and sneer at circumcision. That synagogue they defiled the other night, they wouldn't have done it in daylight because it would have been obviously absurd."

"What did they threaten if you came to the party?" Emma was instantly and efficiently an under-cover agent, which irritated her, but perhaps there was work to be done. "Did they give you any clue to their identity?"

"They said they'd expose me as a kike for all to see, and next time I wouldn't be blubbing, I'd be dead." He shuddered at the memory. "I don't know who they were. Werewolves... a few idiots. But how many idiots do you need to cause trouble?"

Emma nodded maternally and backed towards the colonnade overlooking the rose beds. She had seen a couple of guests lurking within earshot, looking continuously at her and David Simmons and giggling at some private fancy. They were Frankenstein's monster and the Werewolf. As she went near them they backed away.

"Are you looking for something?" she demanded.

"Well really!" The Werewolf was shocked.

"Careful, Dick Turpin, it's the night of the full moon." Frankenstein's monster glared meaningfully. "My friend goes rather wild on these occasions."

"Are you threatening us?" David Simmons sprang to her side.

"You know what. Werewolves are -" He ducked quickly as Simmons hit out at him and then butted him in the stomach. The monster was strong, of course, and his next punch sent Simmons sprawling against the veranda steps.

"Help! We're being attacked," the Werewolf shouted. He turned in panic to Emma and tried to push her on to Simmons, but she swayed to one side and somersaulted him into the chair. "Help!" He kicked savagely at her midriff, then did another backwards somersault over the chair when she grabbed his foot and twisted it sharply over his head. He lay against the stone balustrade yelling for help.

Emma smiled briefly. The monster had seized her from behind. She relaxed in his arms for a moment and then bent forward, lifted his leg up sharply and dropped with all her weight on to his knee. The monster was hurled backwards on to the ground.

"Have we finished?" she asked.

No, the Werewolf was trying to reach the door. He jumped at Emma with his eyes closed and his mouth open. When he opened his eyes again he was still rising, straight over the balustrade and then down into the rose bed.

"Now," said Emma, "let's discuss this like reasonable people."

She landed on the soft ground beside him. He was whimpering tearfully and when she sat on his chest he started yelling again. He stopped after the seventh blow to the kidneys. Eventually he smiled blissfully and agreed to talk.

"What's the significance of dressing up as a Werewolf?"

"You know what parties are," he gasped. "One has to make an effort."

"What is a Werewolf?"

"Can I stand up?" He was a tall, effete young man who could never have terrorised a choirboy in normal dress. "A Werewolf is somebody who turns into a wolf when the full moon -" He sat down again with a surprised thud. "Why did you do that? I'm telling you the truth. Lon Chaney used to play the part, and when Cynthia said to me -"

"What's your name?"

"Picton-Murbless-Gore. Although actually I'm the younger son. Bertram. I don't think we were introduced."

After a few inanities Emma had the feeling she'd made a mistake. The young man was as innocent as he looked. The only reason he had come as the Werewolf was that Cedric had threatened to give him a pint of blood if he came as Count Dracula.

"I had a school mistress like you," he said languidly, "in Tunbridge Wells."

"So what?" She hurried back up the steps to rejoin the party.

"She used to beat me every day."

"I can understand the temptation."

The group in the ballroom was still playing bad Beatlemusic intermingled with bad Carl Perkins but nobody was paying much attention. The guests were distributed, in couples about the stairs and bedrooms, in alcoholic stupors beneath the furniture and in a large crowd round the library door. She looked around for David Simmons but he seemed to have vanished. The pun! Asking a girl for help and then running out on her when the battle started. She decided to go home.

Except that she was staying the weekend. She glanced furtively about and then headed for the stairs.

"Darling," called Cynthia, "you can't go to bed yet. We've been hearing the most tantalising screams from the library. Somebody's being raped!"

"Stand back!" called Lord Throgmorton. He had a key to the library and the crowd made a passage for him to get at the door. Emma waited. She might as well see everything.

Lord Throgmorton threw the door open with a flourish and then stepped back in horror. "My God!" he barked. "What the devil is the fellow doing up there?"

A few women screamed and someone laughed before the general buzz of amazement and disgust began. Then the crowd was pushing forward into the library.

"I say, Emma, come and see what they've done to David," cried Cynthia.

He was hanging from the chandelier by his wrists. He was still alive, but naked from the waist down, and tied to his groin was a card declaring, "A yid is a yid." His shirt tails were hitched up into his mouth to form a gag.

"Well," said Lucrezia Borgia, "did you ever see anything like that?"

Batman was outraged. "Who's he trying to impress?"

But Lord Throgmorton quickly took command. He wasn't the type to do nothing. "All young ladies under the age of seventeen," he called, "back into the stateroom." Then he turned irritably to his wife. "Don't stand there staring, Millie. Get the young people out of here."

While the Bronte sisters next to her were discussing Jewish hygiene Emma fetched a chair and climbed up to release the poor man. He was shivering with embarrassment and obviously terrified of the scandal. Emma cut the handkerchief at his wrists and he fell to the floor.

"The bastards," he moaned, "the bloody bastards." Then he stumbled to his feet and pushed through the crowd. "The bastards!"

Emma picked up the card from the floor. David Simmons wouldn't need it now. She put it in one of her flared pockets and went upstairs to bed.

3

"Someone murdered Freddie"

Cynthia Throgmorton came up to bed at three o'clock. The party had long been over but the guests were slow to depart. Emma heard her pause outside her door. A gentle tap. "Emma. Are you awake?" So it would be another hour before they had any sleep. The old habits of a girls' boarding school die hard. All that brushing of hair and drinking cocoa, the exchange of experiences. She only hoped that Cynthia wouldn't come into the bed.

"Sorry it's so late," she whispered as she closed the door. "Freddie always insists on making love to me before he'll go home. And tonight he was so drunk it took him forty-three minutes."

Emma glanced automatically at her watch. "I thought you were marrying Albert."

"Only for breeding purposes. He'll be the earl when his father dies. What did you think of Freddie?"

"An asset to any woman."

"He's a bore when he's drunk. I think I'll pass him on when the season gets going." She kicked off her dancing shoes and sat on the side of the bed. "It was Freddie who played that trick on poor David. The clot! I mean, he isn't anti-semitic or anything. He simply thought it was a great jape to play on someone. Can I come in with you?"

"All right." Cynthia was twenty-seven and a big girl now. Very big. If she'd needed the money she could have earned her living as a professional wrestler. But her long golden hair was as beautiful as it had been ten years ago when Emma had envied the natural waves and the girl's voluptuous figure. She noted cattily that Cynthia still had a face like a French poodle. "I suppose Freddie is a Werewolf."

"Yes. Speaking of which..." She collapsed into a fit of giggling that made the bed squeak. "The Werewolf. I nearly burst! What were you doing with Bertie down in the garden?"

Emma shrugged. "Knocking him about a little."

"Lucky for Bertie. He used to get me on that a few years ago, but I soon grew bored with it. He's such a wet. I mean, when it comes to conversation he never says anything. Talks about all those old films with Boris Karloff. God help the

country when he gets into parliament. Do you like my scent?"

"Very nice. Tell me about the Werewolves - "

"Oh hell," groaned Cynthia, "it's all that boy scout balls about being British and proving your virility. I only know one way for a man to prove his virility. It was a present from Albert when he came back from Paris, called something like *Sueur du Desir*. I don't think I like it. It's based on the idea that violets are artificial whereas the human body is naturally attractive." She lay back on the pillow and thought for a moment. "Like animals, I suppose. But it didn't work on Freddie. He couldn't smell anything for the whisky fumes."

"Can women join the Werewolves?"

"Oh God, darling, you don't need to prove your virility, do you?"

"I might agree with their principles."

Cynthia looked at her and then closed her eyes. "I don't think there are any principles. They just daub swastikas on synagogues and break up communist party meetings and have fights with people. They do brave things like play Russian roulette." She sat up suddenly and removed her blue slip, then she wriggled about until she had taken off her stockings and roll-on. "Oh yes, you have to believe in Hitler. Things like that. Jewish bankers."

She yawned and closed her eyes again.

"Did you enjoy finishing school?"

"Not much."

"I suppose not. You were too sophisticated. You never had spots or surplus fat. And you over-awed all those young officers. Those Italian kids from the village. How does it feel to be twenty-eight?"

Emma grinned in the dim light. "Much the same. Are you falling asleep?"

"Freddie wore me out."

"Let's go to the next meeting of the Werewolves. It might be fun."

"It's the day after tomorrow. Good night."

Emma moved away to the side of the bed. "Good night."

"The Werewolves are an underground organisation doing something about problems that can only be dealt with illegally in a democracy. Everybody knows that Britain is being swamped by the coloured people, that the Jews have too much power, and that socialism has eaten away our moral fibre. But we can't legally do anything to stop the rot."

They were sitting in the club room of the Old Barn, an historic pub that had been built when Wiltshire became the capital of the New Yorker's England in 1960. It sold excellent beer, and every avid listener sat with the traditional foaming pint before him. Beer and politics was a splendid recipe that had been neglected of late. Which seemed a shame. Alcohol was certainly adding fervour

to the main speech.

"We shall not bother with winning votes or appealing to the press for a fair hearing. We shall fight a guerilla war to destroy the British system of government. Not by marching fifty miles every Easter nor by sitting down in Trafalgar Square. We'll do it the way the Jews did it in Palestine, by secret terror. Within six months we'll reduce the country to panic and chaos."

Freddie Flamborough was a fluent speaker, and he made up for a lack of depth by his intensity. His austere captain's uniform added an extra dimension of menace. Emma felt that the beer halls of Bavaria must have been something like this in the 1920s, equally easy to dismiss as neurotic, but in that instance highly dangerous. She looked about at Freddie's listeners. At Cynthia, who wasn't listening. At the sprinkling of pasty faced private soldiers, half a dozen officers, and the well-bred sons of a bygone ruling class. If the thing had any serious motivation, Emma decided, it was probably something to do with power having now passed to a different section of the community. So the officers and gentlemen were setting up a rearguard action.

"Any questions?" demanded Freddie, leaning glassily across the table.

"Yes." It was Emma Peel. "Given that you reduce the country to a state of chaos, how do you propose to take over and run the administration?"

"The way that conquerors have always taken over. Any more?"

"Yes." It was Emma Peel. "What's your own political philosophy?"

"I don't think you can have been listening."

Emma stood up and sauntered across to the table. "I was listening. I've heard people talk before. Now try to impress me." She sat on the edge of the table and waited.

Freddie stared at her for a moment of toad-like incredulity and then emptied his pint of bitter. "I saw you at the Throgmorton party the other night with David Simmons. What are you doing here?"

"Darling," called a submissive Cynthia from the back, "I brought Emma with me. I've known her since we -"

"You haven't been inducted?"

"No." Emma smiled radiantly. "And on this evidence I don't think I'll bother. I'd rather go back to the Sea Rangers."

The twenty members watched with sullen hostility while she walked between them to the door. Nobody stopped her, so she had to go on downstairs to the bar. She ordered a Campari. Fifteen minutes later the Werewolves came downstairs and continued with the social part of the evening.

"Mrs. Peel?" It was a man of about fifty who had been at the meeting. Greying temples and a smile that he had learnt from watching Cary Grant. "I'm

Colonel Hayburn." He flicked his fingers authoritatively at the barman and ordered a double whisky. "I enjoyed the game you were playing upstairs. You won hands down, and I admire a girl who can win with style. But of course you did leave the initiative to continue the game with us. Let's drink to a more fruitful acquaintance."

Emma raised her glass and looked suitably charmed.

"We *can* answer the questions you were asking, because we have immense riches behind our organisation. Several million pounds. And we have a figurehead who will be perfectly capable of leading the whole country. But you must forgive me if I say no more on those subjects at this point."

Colonel Hayburn leaned across the bar and took the Campari bottle from the shelf, called to "Charlie" for the rest of the whisky, and then he took Emma's arm. "Let's find ourselves a corner where we can get to know each other. I've been looking forward to meeting you since I heard about the way you punished Picton-Murbless-Gore. I like a girl with spirit."

She sat with him in a corner and let him ply the drinks. Hayburn was a ladies' man who worked on the theory that he could out-drink any woman on earth. They spent sixty minutes testing that one.

"You were defending Simmons, I gather." He chuckled indulgently. "He's an attractive lad, I suppose. Did you enjoy cutting him down from the chandelier?"

Emma was tapping her foot to the music for several minutes before she realised with surprise that there was a juke box in this olde horse brass inn. "I didn't realise what was going on," she explained. "Cynthia told me about the Werewolves later that night."

Hayburn laughed, gently, crinkling up his eyes so that it didn't seem as if he was looking at her. "We have a few ceremonies like that, to sort out the wolves from the sheep. Ha ha. We have to, being an illegal organisation, make our members break the law. Then we have a hold over them, and they have to make an effort. It's all rather childish, I suppose, but quite enjoyable if you approach it in the right spirit. After all, politics is rather childish. We make our members burn down the door of a synagogue, rape a negress or publicly humiliate a Jew. Harmless, but illegal. Like the christening ceremonies when you go to a new school."

"Well, who wants to grow up anyway?" She knocked back her drink and matched his third whisky. "Cheers." Perhaps he expected something more from her in the way of response. "You have to devise entertainments for your members, don't you?"

"The secret of government, my dear. You've hit upon it. Sometimes the changing of the guard and the Lord Mayor's Show is enough, and sometimes it

takes a gloriously nasty war to entertain the people. Human nature, they call it. I keep my members happy with petty violence and acts of terrorism, and that way we can move forward. But I admired your perception in seeing that more is required to actually assume the reins of power. We shall need a Hitler Youth movement and an atmosphere of violence to maintain our support, and we'll need several million Jews or negroes who will be fair game for brutality. Perhaps even a few concentration camps for a while, to amuse our disrupted country. These are sops to the sadism of the people, and when we give them outlets for their sadism they will give us power." He chuckled knowingly. "Politics is not a game for idealists, is it?"

Emma wondered. She had never liked Mr. Wilson or Harold Macmillan very much, but perhaps they were men with restraint after all. "Aren't you sailing a little close to the decline and fall of the Roman empire?"

"I am not a homosexual!" Said with such emphasis that the whisky must be taking effect. "How do you feel about communists?" he asked eventually.

"I can take them or leave them. I once knew a director of Unity Theatre and he bored me to death with his single-mindedness. But then a lot of fascists affect me the same way."

"I've devised your initiation test." He giggled tipsily. "I think it should amuse you. And then when you've passed it I'll introduce you to our leader. Drink up and I'll tell you about it."

She took a deep breath. It was all very well to climb the three hundred feet to the top of the Speech Room at Bahia University, because it had only risked her own life, and hanging a chamber pot from the spire had demonstrated how juvenile it was. But this seemed different. Couldn't she just be a friend of the cast, like Cynthia, a harmless hanger-on? Seemingly not.

"The communist party headquarters are due for a little attention. We'd like you to lead the raid on Thursday. You'll make a most charming burglar." Ho ho ho; he laughed so much that he had to be drunk. "Have another drink to our success." Splash splash.

Emma filled up his glass with the rest of the whisky bottle. Then when he waved at her glass she filled that up as well. "To our success." She smiled ironically. "May the better man win."

Colonel Hayburn stood up shakily. "By God yes. May the better man win." He knocked back the whisky in two draughts. "Come back to my place for a night cap," he slurred. "Get to know your new friends."

"I think I know all I need. You'll have to be in better condition to teach me anything more."

Emma drank the rest of the Campari, picked up her bag and walked steadily

out of the pub. As she passed Cynthia she gestured towards the colonel and mentioned that he was in trouble. Then she emerged into the open air. To her rather childish satisfaction Colonel Hayburn didn't follow her this time. He was helped out ten minutes later by Freddie Flamborough and a lance corporal.

"Steed," she said over the phone that night, "I think we're needed."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Peel. We both need a holiday. We see ghosts in the shadows and menace in the phases of the moon -"

"There's no need to be literary."

"The pen is mightier than the sword, Mrs. Peel. Mustn't disparage. Only this morning I demonstrated how Dunkirk could have been transformed into victory."

"All right, I'll show you." She hung up irritably. She would save the world from Nazi domination by herself.

It rained on Thursday night and the streets of Swindon echoed and splashed emptily like a Victorian slum. Their voices as they made their way to Jubilee Street sounded loud and disreputable. The town hall clock struck two in the market square. Emma was feeling unexpectedly tense as they reached the communist party headquarters, perhaps, she told herself, because she was working with amateurs. They huddled outside the shop doorway, and the four men looked at her for leadership.

"Shall we just throw the petrol bomb and scarper?" asked Corporal Higgs.

"Don't be silly." Emma took the slivver of Perspex from her handbag and slid it along the side of the lock. A slight pressure from the shoulder and the door creaked open. The entire operation had taken three seconds. There were no bolts, no burglar alarms. Communists were trusting people. "Come in," she whispered.

In addition to Higgs there were two masters from the local secondary school (one of them didn't really count because he was the sports master) and Colonel Hayburn. Emma closed the door behind them. "All right?" she called softly.

"Yes. There's nobody here."

"Good." Emma turned on all the lights.

Hayburn turned pale. "Is this sensible? We can be seen vividly from the street."

It was an old greengrocer's shop with two workrooms and a kitchen at the rear. The flats above had a separate entrance and there didn't seem to be a basement with an illegal printing press.

"Of course we can be seen," sighed Emma. "The important thing is to look at home. Higgs, sit at that desk and look bolshie. Watch complacently while we go through the files." She turned to the colonel and shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose the only thing for you is to go into the kitchen and make a pot of tea."

"But -"

"It steadies the nerves when you're working late. And if the constable on the beat does drop in for a chat he's bound to recognise you. So keep out of the way while we do the work."

Colonel Hayburn wrestled with his convictions that a woman's place was in the kitchen, then he grunted and did as he was ordered. Emma remained in command of the three terrified burglars to sort through the party papers. They made sad reading. A mailing list of seven hundred supporters - who were in fact only people who had attended a meeting or a jumble sale. One hundred and three card carrying members, seventy-two of whom hadn't paid their subscriptions for years.

And in another drawer were letters from King Street, carbon copies of letters to the *Morning Star*, humdrum letters of solid support for this and that, massive protest in the strongest possible terms against other enormities. She wondered why they were bothering. Was this the truth behind that awful spectre that haunted western civilisation? Seedy, hard up and intellectually sterile.

"They might be glad if we set this place on fire," said Emma. "They need the insurance money."

"Hurry up," grumbled Higgs. "We've been here thirty-five minutes."

Emma noticed that the games master was tinkering with the petrol bomb as if it were a prayer wheel and the genuine schoolmaster kept sidling up to the window and peering into the street. "You'd better chase up that cup of tea," she ordered. "Tell the colonel we're thirsty."

Corporal Higgs crept into the kitchen. "Colonel Hayburn," he whispered, "sir."

"Get out," she heard him say thickly. "I'm busy." He was just visible through the crack at the side of the door, slumped thoughtfully over the kitchen table and staring at a bottle.

"Let's get out of this place," snapped the schoolmaster. "I'm damned scared."

Emma laughed brightly and sat at the desk. "No point in coming here without making a full search of the premises." She was enjoying the occasion. It was a real test of their manhood. She carefully picked the desk lock with a bent pin while they sweated.

"Quick," the games master shouted. "Here's a copper."

"Relax. Carry on sorting through those pamphlets for heaven's sake. You're all behaving like schoolboys on a scrumping expedition. Wasn't this supposed to be a test of nerve?" She shook her head at their childish ways before turning her attention back to the papers in the desk.

The Co-operative Wholesale Society Bank folder showed that the party had a credit of thirty-seven pounds and that someone called B. H. Keegan kept them

solvent. The bottom drawer contained files, marked with such names as Hayburn, Throgmorton, Harris... One of the Werewolves, Emma realised, must be a spy.

The street door knob rattled from the outside.

The files listed who had attended the seven meetings since January and summarised what was said. It gave thumbnail sketches of individual members and made guesses at such matters as finance and backing. It should be easy to work out who had made these reports.

There was a knock at the street door.

"There's a knock at the door," said the games master.

"So answer it," Emma said patiently. "And remember that if you look nervous we'll all be arrested."

He went to the door. While he was saying good evening to the policeman Emma glanced over her shoulder to see whether Higgs and the colonel were likely to prove an embarrassment. But the kitchen was silent.

"Good evening, constable," said Emma. "It's nice to know that we're being looked after so efficiently. Can we offer you a cup of tea while you're here?"

The policeman puffed for a moment while he examined their three faces. "That would be very acceptable, miss. It's cold out tonight. Luckily the rain has given over."

Emma put her head round the kitchen door and called, "Higgs, an extra cup of tea for the constable." She smiled diffidently at the sound of a tray being dropped on the floor. "Are you the normal policeman on this beat?" she asked conversationally.

"Yes, miss. I don't think I've seen you before."

"No, you wouldn't have. I'm from London. King Street sent me down to sort out a few local confusions. That's why these poor gentlemen are working so late."

"Is Mr. Goldman here?"

Emma laughed. "I'm afraid not. That's what the confusion is all about. He won't be working here any more."

"But he's been secretary for seventeen years." The constable removed his helmet and scratched his head. "Has he been purged?"

"Well, relieved of his duties. He hasn't been liquidated, because this is England. Ha ha ha. Things have changed in the two years since Mr. Khrushchev retired. By the way, this is Mr. Keegan, the new secretary." She waved towards the games master. "Say hello to the policeman, Mr. Keegan."

"Hello," said the games master.

At that moment Higgs came in with the tea looking more nervous than a live

eel about to be jellied. The cups rattled as he put the tray on the desk.

"One lump, constable, or two?"

"Three, if you don't mind, Mrs. -?"

"Peel. I'm afraid we don't have any chocolate biscuits."

"That's all right, Mrs. Peel. I'm supposed to be slimming."

The policeman must have been used to unfriendly people because he didn't seem unduly suspicious of the three monosyllabic men who stood around waiting for him to go. He relaxed and enjoyed the cup of tea and talked happily about the halcyon days in 1936 when he'd almost joined the C.P. himself.

"But I'm glad I didn't," he said solemnly. "The occupation of eastern Europe wasn't a brotherly manoeuvre, and look at Hungary. Nasty business that. I'm non-political myself. You have to be, in the police."

Eventually he placed the empty cup in the precise centre of the desk, put his helmet back on and said that he must be going. "I hope you stay around, Mrs. Peel," he declared, "at least long enough to give me another cup of tea. Good night, brothers. Ha ha ha." And he went back into the street feeling very pleased with himself.

As soon as the policeman had turned the corner Higgs ran back into the kitchen and dragged out Colonel Hayburn. "I'm bloody leaving," he shouted to Emma, "and you can say what the hell you like."

Emma didn't say anything. She put the files under her arm so that she could read more about the Werewolves in bed, glanced quickly round the headquarters to make sure that nothing incriminating had been left behind, and followed the rest of the party. They were already half way up the street, walking noisily and fast, with Colonel Hayburn in the middle to maintain him on a straight course.

"Spirit," the colonel was saying drunkenly, "I always like to encourage spirit when I see it. That bitch has a spirit of adventure. I like that. Nerve. The thrill of battle."

They hadn't exploded the petrol bomb, but it was better that way. Emma doubted whether the communist party would report the theft of a few files, and they could sort out the mysterious reinstatement of Mr. Goldman next time they saw the policeman. But arson was a crime.

"Emma, you bitch, that was pretty well handled. Come here and let me lean on you. I liked that, it took nerve."

Colonel Hayburn put an arm round her shoulders and they staggered towards the railway terminus. He seemed happy again, now that the weather had cleared. He waved vaguely to the three men and climbed into the passenger seat of Emma's Lotus Elan.

"Where are we going?" he demanded.

"To your regimental barracks," she sighed.

Hayburn talked all the way back, incoherently, but he meant well. He tried to tell her that she was initiated into the Werewolves and that he admired her spirit. He liked to encourage spirit when he saw it. He was going to make her an important person in the movement, because she had spirit. That sort of thing.

"I mean, Emma, you mustn't think we're a lot of boy scouts. We're a bloody serious organisation. Did I tell you we've seven million pounds at our disposal? I mean, that's money, old girl. But that isn't all. The seven million pounds is in solid gold, things like that. It isn't in bloody pound notes. But we can make our own pound notes in a few weeks time. Did I tell you that? We shall soon have the presses that Hitler used to run off British currency during the war."

"I bet your bank manager calls you sir," said Emma.

Hayburn stared at her morosely as she turned left into the parade ground. "You aren't the fluffy, submissive type, are you? What does it take to make you swoon?"

Emma squealed to a halt beside the guard room door feeling distinctly faint. The car next to her was a green Speed Six Bentley, 1929 vintage.

"Why not come in for a drink?" asked Hayburn. "It's only half past three."

"That's a nice idea."

"Good lord," said Hayburn. "Really?"

She pushed the files carefully under the driving seat and then helped Hayburn out of the low slung car. He was affected by the cold air. Eager to promise her power in the Werewolf revolution and anxious to make a pass at her, but he was having enough trouble remembering to act soberly. A colonel never sings first world war songs.

"What the bloody hell's going on?" he demanded as he fell through the door. "Don't you people know that it's half past three?"

There were twenty or thirty people in the officers' mess, half of them apparently policemen, and one of them dead. He was under a white sheet in the middle of the floor.

"Colonel Hayburn?" asked a superintendent. "I'm afraid there's been an accident. One of your men has been murdered."

"One of my men?" he mumbled. "What was he doing in the officers' mess?"

"A captain, actually. Name of Flamborough. Did you know him?"

"Course I did. I'm the colonel. Knew old Freddie well. How did he cop it?"

"I'm afraid he was strangled."

"Silly bugger. How can you strangle someone - I mean, he must have lost a fight or something. Unless he was drunk. I want a full report on this incident."

Emma sidled away while he was talking to the superintendent. She had seen

the debonair character lounging in the corner with Cynthia and smoking a panatella. She was looking forward to meeting him.

But he looked up as she approached. "Mrs. Peel," he said superfluously, "we're needed."

4

Girl in a hot pink dress

Steed looked up from the dining table and smiled. "While you've been living, going to parties in fancy dress and gadding about with Colonel Haystack, I've been doing a little research."

Emma nodded patiently. "The name is Hayburn. And I still don't understand how you were on the scene of the crime last night."

"I stumbled across the Werewolves when a dispatch rider was killed down the lane. And the more I thought about it," he said complacently, "the more dubious it seemed. So I potted about. I spoke to his commanding officer, who denied knowing what a Werewolf was, and that convinced me that he knew quite a bit. After all, ask most innocent people what is a Werewolf and they'll start telling you about the Caucasian legend, night of the full moon, Mr. Hyde stuff. Whereas Colonel Hayseed said he didn't know anything."

"Hayburn." Emma tucked into the food and let him continue with the explanations. It kept him happy. He was turning into a man of logic and intellect since he began writing his history of the second world war. "I say," she interrupted suddenly, "you could call your book *Intelligence Is Not Enough*."

"Mrs. Peel, your Squab a la Soleil will be getting cold." He sipped a glass of white wine and the frown was replaced by a contented smile. "I had these hens specially sent up from Cornwall on Monday. No other birds are quite the same."

"Delicious," she pronounced. "The nice thing about your hospitality is that the food is always excellent. This old house is draughty, I expect it's damp, and you have to walk about on your knees to avoid the beams. But the food is always superb."

Steed looked around with injured pride. "I had the House & Garden people down here last week. They were vastly impressed. I told them that next Christmas I shall roast an ox over the fire." He nodded impressively. "Of course, I didn't show them the garden. Some aspects of the all-round man are not in my nature."

"You should get a man in," said Emma.

"I suppose so. But I regard those weeds as a challenge. One of these weekends, I tell myself, I shall buy a spade or whatever one needs and I shall attack the indiscipline of nature and restore order. It would be admitting defeat to

hire a man."

When the four course lunch was finished they retired to the sitting room for brandy and coffee. Steed glanced through the files from the Jubilee Street headquarters and clucked from time to time. While she waited Emma browsed through the books and blew dust off the porcelain. Steed had a woman, three mornings a week, but she didn't do very much polishing. Two days' washing up, probably, and God knows how much laundry, followed by a quick sweep round if there was time. Emma smiled at the abridged Gibbon on the desk beside Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*. Steed was finding out how history should be written. The thunderous phrase and the mighty rebuke to dead statesmen.

"Tonight there was a sensation," Steed suddenly read aloud. "A colour supplement girl in a multicoloured camel coat and a hot pink dress broke up the meeting. She jeered at the fascists for being negative. Afterwards she drank the colonel under the table and then drove off in a small fast car. She might be the fun girl she seems or she might be a government agent taking time off from the serious business of world communism. If so, I'd say she enjoys her work and might be dangerous."

Steed smiled exasperatingly and refrained from comment.

"Let's assume," Emma snapped, "that I'm a government agent. What do you make of these wretched Werewolves?"

"Cranks," said Steed. "They could safely be left to the police, if it weren't for these mysterious references to a figurehead and immense wealth. You'd better carry on with the job."

She put down her brandy glass very carefully before speaking. "What will you be doing?"

"Working, Mrs. Peel. I shall be sorting these things into the right perspective. Fascism, after all, isn't a sudden phenomenon. And Hitler was neither the first nor last - "

"Damn your history. Wouldn't it be a better idea to chase up the immense wealth? It would save us a lot of embarrassment if we could have them put away for the Great Train Robbery or forgery."

"Never under-rate history, Mrs. Peel." At his most infuriating, Steed walked solemnly over to his desk and picked up the precious manuscript. "Let me read you some of it. I think you'll find it illuminating."

Emma drank the rest of her brandy and poured another. If Steed had gone off his rocker through unaccustomed introspection she would need some fortifying. She had always known Steed claimed that ethics and self-analysis were outside his normal range of interests.

"When the German nation surrendered with Admiral von Doenitz," he read resonantly, "that was not intended to be the end of the fighting. Martin Bormann meant to carry on from the mountainous slopes of Bavaria, to fight and fight until the Third Reich was utterly destroyed down to the last man. Only then, the Nazis believed, would the super race rise from the ashes of civilisation. Or perhaps they intended merely to retire to Bavaria and grow old gracefully. For whichever reason, the Reichsminister of Economics had deposited all of Germany's remaining gold, cash, precious stones and metals in a vault on the shores of Lake Walchensee.

"It had long been known that Goering had hoarded a fortune in loot from the ravaged cities of Paris, Prague, Vienna. And this irreplaceable treasure..." He looked at her and then raised an eyebrow. "Well?"

"I don't like that phrase, the mountainous slopes of Bavaria. They *are* mountains."

"You seem to have missed the point." Spoken with the massive dignity of a Swift accused of graffiti. "The point is that we abandoned the search for that treasure. I was sent back to Berlin after two days, because the Americans had taken over the sector. But as far as I know that treasure was never recovered."

"I still think you should do something about that phrase."

Steed tossed the manuscript back on his desk. "I'll re-write the entire chapter, but first I intend to do some research on the subject. If you need me for the next three days I'll be in Bavaria."

5

Mrs. Peel picks buttercups

Berniston was a two mile walk from Steed's cottage, and Emma set off for Throgmorton Hall shortly after eight in the evening. The sun was setting behind a low hill and that total stillness in the air, broken occasionally by the buzz of midges round a beech tree, reminded her of the myth that belongs to childhood and has become clothed by memory in Edwardian dress. An early butterfly caught her eye, flitting away from a hawthorn hedge. All it needed was the distant click of a cricket bat or the low whirr of a tractor across the fields. She wondered whether in fifty years' time the dream would change. Perhaps to evocations of caravan sites, transistor radios and the scream of jet planes. The smell of honeysuckle would be replaced by clean air and the people on the village green would be dressed in steel blue overalls.

As she neared the hall Emma felt uneasily that she was being followed. But when she looked round there was no-one in sight. Two children crossed the road, laughing as children should at the beginning of summer, and a farm labourer came over the brow of the rise on a bicycle. "Evenin', miss," he grunted as he passed, which was nice. Perhaps the world was eternal after all, and things like fascism or communism or capitalism, wars and people dying were all illusions to support the idea of time moving forward.

Emma Peel, aged seven, skipped across the dry ditch and put out her tongue at a solemn cow by the gate. It stared back but it was used to children. She picked a buttercup and held it under her chin. What was it meant to indicate? That she didn't wet the bed? that she liked butter? She couldn't remember. She clambered over the fence and took the short cut to the hall. The big house it would have seemed in those days compared with her father's home in St. John's Wood. She hopped from furrow to furrow singing *Cruising Down the River* on a Sunday Afternoon.

Yes, she could see him now. He had paused by the gate where the cows were and then he started running crouched-backed along the side of the open-stone wall. Emma swerved, increased her pace and tried to reach the corner of the field before her pursuer. If he was armed it would make no difference because she was defenceless anyway in the middle of an open field. Oh dear, back to the adult life!

Darkness, Emma realised, takes only about ten minutes to fall. She reached the corner and sprang over the wall, but there was nobody around. He must have hidden among that knot of trees. Lurking there, watching her in the dusk.

Emma crept back over the wall and sprinted to the place where the stones rose to a height of nearly four feet. She cleared them in a gratifying leap and fell to the ground on the other side. Then she waited. Whoever was following her was less fit than she was. It took him nearly half a minute to reach the spot, and he was gasping as he tried to clamber over the wall. She reached up, grabbed his hand and pulled.

"Help!" the man screamed. He thrashed out at her in panic and then spun round to land on his shoulder by her feet. In a reflex movement she helped him up and stretched him across the stones. But just as her knee was rising into his groin she stopped.

"Bertie! What are you doing here?"

"I was following you." He was still tall and effete, but more languidly uninteresting than sinister. Perhaps the blond hair made him nondescript. Emma stood him up and straightened his tie. "I didn't recognise you without the Frankenstein gear."

"Do you think it's an improvement?"

"No. Why were you following me?"

"I think he enjoys being thrown about by an elegant woman," Emma explained to Cynthia when she returned. "As far as I know he wasn't trying to kill me."

Cynthia wasn't interested. She was still absorbed in her own tragedy. "Why couldn't they have murdered Bertie instead?" she demanded. "Bertie might even have enjoyed it."

"Bertie is too much of a puny to be murdered."

"So was Freddie! I can't see the difference between them."

"So why don't you take up with Bertie and forget the mourning?" Emma was unaccustomed to the dramatic heroine pose from Cynthia. "I'm sure All Bertie needs is the love of a good woman. And that would stop him from jumping out on me when I least expect it."

"Emma! How can you be so inhuman? Bertie is absolutely gauche. I mean, where could I go with him? A man is supposed to be a status symbol, you know."

Emma shrugged. "I didn't think Freddie was much of a symbol. More like a shocked toad."

"So what? He was rich, wasn't he?" She flounced petulantly to the door. "I shall remain in mourning for the rest of the week! And black doesn't even suit me."

Cynthia paused before opening the door, sighed, and went back to the sideboard. After a soulful moment she selected a banana. "I think you should go into mourning for Freddie instead. After all, I'm engaged to Albert. It wouldn't look right for me to be in black, would it?" She ate the banana in four sharp bites. "Are you going out this evening?"

"I'm not sure." Emma had no intention of taking lonely girls with her to meet Ludwig Harris. "I might be seeing Colonel Hayburn."

Cynthia groaned. "I shall be alone in this place. Father went off to Germany this morning and Albert won't be here until the weekend. What shall I do?"

"Tatting?" suggested Emma.

This was the kind of evening life they don't show you in the *Tatler*. Cynthia wandered about being alternately grief stricken and bored, she made three phone calls to frightfully amusing people who were too busy to come out right at this moment. And Emma had to stay down in the room with her because otherwise when Hayburn came to collect her he'd probably be compromised into taking Cynthia off to be amused by his regiment.

"By the way," said Cynthia suddenly, "it probably isn't safe to leave me here by myself. I might be murdered."

"Why on earth would anyone murder you?"

"Someone murdered Freddie."

"That was different. He wasn't attractive, vivacious or feminine."

"Oh. Do you think I might be raped instead?"

"I doubt it."

"Really, Emma, you are a bore 1 It's up to you to look after me. Because you're some sort of spy, aren't you? You should be turning the county upside down and then dramatically arresting the killer. *That* would brighten up a Wednesday evening in May."

"Shall we see what's on television? There might be a play -"

"I don't like plays. And I wish I hadn't invited you down for the weekend. It was only because David was so scared. He asked me if I knew a good private detective."

"Thanks."

"I don't think you really care about Freddie!"

Emma went to the drinks tray and examined the selection. "You may be bored, Cynthia, but quarrelling isn't the most useful way of passing the time. Sit down and practise your civilised conversation. And by the end of the week if you've been a good girl I'll tell you who strangled that insufferable young man. But there's no point in being hysterical." She chose a rather inferior brandy and took it to the window.

"How will you know by the end of the week?" She was sulking now, which was preliminary to an apology.

"Because there are two alternatives. One, that Freddie wasn't a gentleman and that he was murdered for not paying his gambling debts or for having an affaire with someone else's fiancée "

"Freddie would never have owed money to people like that."

"Or, two, that he was killed because of his association with the Werewolves. In the first case the police will soon find out who did it, and in the second case I shall soon find out."

A car was coming up the drive at seventy miles an hour. It had to be an army private with spirit, with Colonel Hayburn huddled in terror at the back.

"What do you mean, someone else's fiancée? You don't think Albert would murder anyone for me?" She considered the prospect and then giggled. "That would be fun, wouldn't it?"

"Rattling."

To Emma's astonishment the chauffeur leaped out of the car with a bugle, and standing rigidly to attention in the forecourt he blew the call for parade. It seemed as if Hayburn had started drinking early this evening. Emma slipped her deep purple jacket over the catsuit and went out prepared for the worst.

"If I'm raped," Cynthia called after her, "I'll thank you for it!"

The chauffeur saluted as he opened the door for her, but then Emma had to hang on desperately as the car shot round in a circle and roared away down the drive. Hayburn was huddled in the dark depths of the back seat, his face occasionally lit up by the glow of a cigarette.

"Is that Al Capone over there?" asked Emma.

He didn't answer.

"Where are we going?"

The car had turned into the Swindon road.

"I thought we were going to see Ludwig Harris," she murmured.

"Eh? What do you mean?" Hayburn leaned forward and switched on the interior light. "What do you know about Harris?"

This was the difficult part. She laughed indulgently. "Don't you remember what you said to me last night? You must have had more to drink than I knew." He wasn't reassured so Emma pushed him further. "You told me that Harris was the great leader and you promised to introduce me to him."

The penetrating stare wavered from her face to the rest of her body. "What else did I say?"

"You told me that the Reichsbank money - or Goering's treasure, I didn't quite follow which, was at your disposal."

Hayburn nodded. "You know an awful lot."

"I'm a member, aren't I?"

"Yes." He switched off the light and they sped on in silence until he spoke again. "One of our members is a traitor."

The Swindon barracks had been built in the days when army discipline had been famous throughout the world. Through the guardroom and down a flight of dungeon steps led to a room where the backbone had been put into the British Empire. No-one, Hayburn explained, had ever escaped from this room, and no-one had ever left it feeling mollicoddled.

"Until I came here this place hadn't been used for fifty years. But I'm a traditionalist. I started using it for my special customers. It takes more than a psychologist and a chaplain to make a soldier."

The room, Emma discovered, was really a kind of torture chamber, with equipment that passed out of common usage long before the war. She was surprised to find the soldiers in the guardroom saluting cheerfully and watching her go downstairs with Hayburn as if there was no cause for secrecy. The military mind had always baffled her.

"Can you trust those men?" she asked incredulously.

"Of course. They're only the rank and file. They have a respect for discipline instilled in them during their first weeks in the army. They regard this dungeon as a sick joke, against the weak."

There were thirty people waiting for them, and they were a modern star chamber. One of their number would be placed on trial when that one was found. Emma tried not to look at the rack and the brazier, the wires running from an electric socket to those fancy implements, the selection of whips and hose pipes. There were too many people looking at her and hoping that she would be found guilty.

Because then they would be innocent.

Emma sat timidly on the edge of a cramp-cage and waited for the proceedings to begin. The heavy iron door had been closed on them; they were all ready for the trial.

Colonel Hayburn held up his hand for silence, although there hadn't been much light conversation. "All right," he rasped, "I expect you know what this is about. One of our men has been murdered, and we're here to find out who did it. The police have been blundering about all day, and we're the Werewolves, and we're better at justice than the police."

As he spoke he walked slowly round the room, swishing a paddle cane here and cranking the rack there in a general attack on everyone's nerves.

"Freddie Flamborough was killed by someone in this room, because we're the

only ones who knew he was a Werewolf. And this was on his head when his body was found." Hayburn held up a rubber mask of a Werewolf's face, like the one Bertie had worn at the party.

"Anyone could find out that he was a Werewolf," said a man at the back, "if he really wanted to. I wouldn't mind betting that the police have a file on us -"

"Not the police," snapped Hayburn. "The secret service is on to us, not the police. I had a visit last week from a man I know to be in Military Intelligence and he was asking about that fool Wilkes. He pretended that he just happens by chance to live near the scene of the accident, but somebody must have tipped him off. We have a security leak somewhere."

The man at the back was talking again. Name of Peter de'Ath. "If you mean that man John Steed he does live near the scene of the accident."

"You seem to know an awful lot, Peter. Come out here."

Peter de'Ath shuffled out to the front of the star chamber. He was a young, balding man in a baggy brown suit. "I don't know anything more than you. I was trying to use my wits. If things have been going wrong this last week, I asked myself, what positive conclusion can we draw?"

Hayburn grinned. "And you answered yourself?"

"Well." He twitched a little and moved his feet. "I thought, purely of the top of my head, you understand, that since Wilkes died and the man Steed intruded briefly, the only new factor in the Werewolves is Mrs. Peel. She pushed her way into our organisation at exactly the moment -"

"She was with me," snapped Rayburn, "when Freddie got himself killed."

"If she is a government agent she will not be working alone."

Hayburn seemed to relish the opportunity of asking Emma what she had to say to that.

"He's quite right," said Emma, "I am the newest member. But I found out about the organisation from a complete outsider, so that probably invalidates your entire theory. Cynthia Throgmorton told me about the Werewolves over a cup of hot cocoa."

Hayburn smiled proudly at her. "Has anybody else anything to say?" No. "All right, then I'll tell you where I was with Mrs. Peel and three other men last night. I was raiding the communist party headquarters. And we found there a file on this organisation that proves that one of you is an infiltrator. In fact, to be honest with you, Mrs. Peel found the file and I saw her steal it before we went. But I was too drunk by the time we went home to read it." He turned with another one of those dangerous smiles to Emma. "Perhaps you've had time to glance at it today?"

"Yes," said Emma. "It gave accounts of every meeting the Werewolves have

held since January. And it described the members in detail -"

"Thank you, Mrs. Peel. I think that establishes that we have a communist in our midst. It only remains to decide whether he would wish to murder Freddie Flamborough." Colonel Hayburn laughed gently and walked towards Peter de'Ath. "As I recall it, Peter, you joined this organisation in January?"

"Well, yes, but -"

"Take off your clothes. Unless you want to spoil that suit. We're going to sit you in a bath of water and persuade you to talk with a few electric shocks. I don't really mind how you're dressed."

Peter de'Ath was still protesting when Corporal Higgs and two more men seized him by the arms.

"Just put him in that bath," said Hayburn, "and let Mrs. Peel administer the torture. She has already proved herself the best man in our organisation."

Emma watched them put the man fully dressed in a tank with his bald head protruding, as in a Turkish bath, and when it was filled with water she was introduced to the dials and switches on the side.

"This was found very effective in Algeria," said Hayburn. "I think with a little guile you should persuade him to agree to almost anything. But the art of torture is to ask the right questions. I don't want him to confess to murdering Abraham Lincoln."

The spell was broken on the rest of the audience, and Emma could feel them gradually radiating hostility and the desire to reassert themselves. When she pressed the current switch and de'Ath screamed for the first time she heard someone snigger, and within two minutes the entire thirty people were cheering every time he yelled.

The man's head was white and wet, balanced on the top of the tank in agony as if it were looking for his body. The eyes were wide open, pleading and terrified. Emma, wished he was facing the other way. It wasn't her idea of justice. She tried telling herself that he didn't count, he was a communist or fascist or anyway he was bald. This was a risk you took when you dabbled in politics.

"Are you a member of the communist party?"

"Yes. Yes, I already told you."

"Did you kill Freddie Flamborough?"

"No. I swear -"

And of course he hadn't. Emma turned away to Colonel Hayburn and told him to carry on. "If he admits to anything else he's lying."

"Good girl, Emma. You'd have gone right to the top in the middle ages." Hayburn turned to his audience. "All right, what do we do with traitors?"

"Brand him!" someone shouted. "Flog him to death." "Stretch him on the rack." They had lost their inhibitions now and the release of tension had left them feeling exhilarated.

Emma went towards the soundproof heavy door, because it was furthest away from the mob, and leaned against the stone wall. She found the claustrophobic hysteria rather depressing, but she was part of it, she told herself. Mustn't be a snob.

She suddenly became aware of an old man standing next to her. She hadn't seen him arrive, but he was standing there watching the scene with riveting intensity, radiating an energy that made it seem impossible that they hadn't felt his presence sooner. A frail, erect figure with his right arm clamped across his body to still the twitching left hand. He stared briefly at Emma, and the hypnotic black eyes made her flinch.

"You wanted to meet Herr Harris," murmured Colonel Hayburn beside her. "Sir, may I present Mrs. Peel."

"Most charming." He flashed out a hand and smiled briefly.

"What shall we do to Mr. de'Ath, sir? He admits to being a spy -"

"Do what you wish. I cannot be bothered with the details of your organisation, Colonel Hayburn. Dispose of the man, and ensure that it does not happen again."

Harris walked into the room and scrutinised the man in the tank. Emma noticed that he dragged his left leg as he walked. After a petrifying stare Harris turned to leave. "Come," he snapped at Hayburn. "And bring the young lady."

Harris lived in a farmhouse a few miles north of Swindon with his wife and a large alsatian called Biondi. The food was disappointing because Harris was a vegetarian. He was also a teetotaler. When they sat down for a friendly chat after supper Emma was still not accustomed to the nervous tension the old man generated in everyone. And she was slightly put out by his oratory. He talked for minutes on end at high speed in a thick accent, rising in frenzy, turning crimson with rage and then smiling at his own satirical wit. Then he seemed to lose interest until the next outburst.

"Mrs. Peel," he said suddenly. "Why are you in this movement?"

His gaze was so firm that she couldn't play for time while she worked out the answer he expected. "I drifted into it. I became involved in an incident at Throgmorton Hall and Cynthia took me along to the next meeting. There I met Colonel Hayburn."

"She obviously had the right spirit, Ludwig -"

"You're a fool, Hayburn. You drink too much and you enjoy pandering to the tastes of the mob. You're like Goering. Fat and good natured, lazy and corrupt.

Tonight I was watching Mrs. Peel's interrogation and I admired its efficiency. It was brutal without being self indulgent. A rare combination."

"I told you she was ruthless -"

"Shut up. I can see that she will be useful. The only question is whether she feels deeply with us. Within weeks there will be pressures put upon our leadership and the slightest wavering will be disastrous. I shall need absolute loyalty."

Emma risked an answer. "Loyalty is something between us, it doesn't depend on whether I believe in Keynesian economics or the theory of eternal ice. A project like this requires one man with vision, not thirty people with theories of their own."

Harris stared at her for a tense moment. "Intelligent," he said at last. "I have never found beautiful women very useful in politics. But Madame Dubarry was probably useful. Right, I have decided. Mrs. Peel, you will take over from Colonel Hayburn while he is away, and you will take the opportunity of revitalising his rabble in every way. It is an army, and it needs military discipline. It needs to expand, and it needs to be ready for attack. Show me your programme tomorrow at noon."

He appeared to have dismissed her with those words. "Excuse me," she intruded, "but how long will Colonel Hayburn be gone?"

"Seven days."

She nodded. For the next ten minutes she sat back and listened to Hayburn's protestations that the Werewolves were his department and he couldn't leave his regiment for a week at such short notice.

"It is necessary," shouted Harris. "We must look after our interests in Bavaria before the N.P.D. beats us to reclaiming them. Can you imagine what would happen if the Germans had so much wealth at their disposal? They would be independent, supreme. You will go there immediately. I shall always be the world leader of our movement."

"Yes, sir."

"I must always be the leader."

"Yes, sir."

"Albert Speer has been out of prison for several months now, and I don't trust him. He tried to murder me once, and he probably knows too much. Yes, yes, I know, he's a bureaucrat, but he has ambitions as well. We must act immediately."

Colonel Hayburn was entirely crushed. "I know what to do."

Ludwig Harris nodded impatiently. They were both dismissed. But as his wife Eva was showing them out, Harris called Emma back. "I am worried about our security," he said. "Give it special thought for tomorrow."

"I will."

"Too many things have gone wrong with Hayburn's people. The murder of Flamborough will have to be cleared up, and communist spies will have to be punished. But I'm particularly worried about a man called Steed; he is an undercover agent who spent some months in Berlin at the end of the war, and I want you to kill him."

6

Spies always travel light

The rail journey from Partenkirchen to Innsbruck is stark, majestic and intimidating. It winds rapidly through the mountains high above the valley of the Inn. Steed peered down, God-like, on the river and the tiny road. There were people on foot and motor-cars crawling slowly along but they were dwarfed by the Tirolian Alps opposite. Amid scenery like this it was difficult not to despise the small grocer sitting in the same carriage or the solid fraulein in the corner who was legally entitled to call herself frau.

Steed left the train at Mittenwald. The rest of the journey to Einsiedeln would have to be made by road. He braced himself for the worst and went into the nearest car hire firm. They could only offer him a Volkswagen and when he asked whether they had anything safer they became intensely nationalistic.

"My dear fellow, everyone knows that the Bentley is the finest car on the road. They'd have to be pretty small folk to get into this thing."

But it was no use reasoning with them, and half an hour later Steed had set off along the Walchensee road in a small black automated Beetle. Oh well, they couldn't blame him if he crashed the thing into the river. Damned square-heads, they couldn't even drive on the correct side of the road.

He found the mountain air a little intoxicating, and by the end of the ninety-minute journey he was feeling positively inspired. No wonder Hitler went mad, spending so much time in this part of the country. There were only the mountain spirits to talk to, or those stout men in short trousers with feathers in their caps.

The road dropped suddenly into Einsiedeln, and stretched out in front of him was the massive lake nearly a thousand feet above sea level. Steed stopped the car and got out to admire the place. There was no doubt about it, when they built Dachau concentration camp in Bavaria they were trying to give the prisoners every advantage.

When he reached the village and tried to book a room at the hotel the fellow asked Steed whether he was an American, and then they had a wrangle about a suitable tea. It was half past four, dammit, and he had been travelling for hours.

"It's not as if I'm asking for tea and muffins with raspberry jam. A decent brandy, that's all, with buttered toast."

As the place had a population of 500 this was the only inn so Steed had to

settle for the sickly home-brewed brandy and do his toast in the kitchen.

He had no settled plans until the following morning and Steed spent the evening reading up on the area, finding out who else was staying at the hotel and chatting to the local inhabitants. He had intended to deny all knowledge of the language, an elementary trick, but since no-one else in the village spoke English he had to abandon the idea. Insular people, the Germans.

"I'm an English journalist," he told Herr Kurtmann, "and I'm writing a book on your country since the war."

Kurtmann nodded. "I've owned this inn for thirty years and I still know nothing about Germany. Why not visit Bonn?"

"It's full of politicians. Whereas Bavaria, I gather, is the soul of the German people."

"I know nothing about that. Perhaps you should talk to Herr Goldberg. He is also staying at this inn, in the room next to yours. He is a journalist writing a series of articles about this country since the war."

Steed went up to his room. It overlooked the lake and as darkness fell he was reminded of all those gothic fairy tales and the Grimm scenery that children are thought to love. The gentle slopes of the Mendip Hills seemed a long way away. A peaceful period cottage is one thing, but in this inn Steed half expected to go downstairs and find that the thirty years war was still raging.

At half past seven that evening Steed heard Herr Goldberg leave his room and go downstairs. Steed watched him leave the inn and vanish along the cobbled street. He smiled. Journalist writing a series of articles indeed! The fellow was obviously up to something, and in this part of the country that could only mean one thing.

Steed slipped along the passage to Goldberg's door. It was locked, but he wasn't visible from the bar so he took his time in picking the lock. When he got in he locked the door again behind him. The window was open, so if anybody came in he could make a quick exit. He flicked on his pencil torch and began the search.

The fellow was, as Steed had deduced, an imposter. He had twelve rounds of .38 ammunition in his case. At the bottom of his brief case there was a bottle of genuine Scotch whisky, which under the circumstances....

An Israeli passport confirmed that Goldberg was a journalist and gave his origin as German. He was 35 and unmarried. He had no particular blemishes. But Steed was still unconvinced: Only a spy carries so little on his travels that you can learn almost nothing about the man from his luggage. He left a spike microphone in the wall behind a notice giving the hotel regulations in four languages, took the bottle of Scotch and climbed out of the window.

He inched his way slowly along the narrow ledge to his own room and climbed in feeling rather pleased with the success of his mission. He smoked a panatella and drank a large Scotch before going downstairs to meet the locals.

Conversation became easier as the night wore on and the beer overcame their suspicion of strangers. Before nine o'clock three different people had said to him, "Journalist? You won't find the Hitler treasure in these mountains." But after nine o'clock they became willing to boast about the German economic recovery even though it had little to do with Bavaria.

It was no accident, it seemed, that Hitler had gained his first support from this part of Germany, and that the N.P.D. had gained the most ground here. These were the thinkers and the philosophers; they didn't mind the Ruhr valley providing the economic strength and Bonn the administration. This was where three men in braces had the vision. One of them was a Burgomaster and the other two were shopkeepers. They spoke, they told Steed, for Germany.

By the end of the evening Steed realised that the Second World War had really been about the unification of Europe, and that this was now being brought about by the common market. Unfortunately Germany was again a divided nation as she had been after the First World War, and that would have to be put right. The other point that roused them to fury was that she was an occupied country, occupied by the Russians in one half and the Americans in the other. They banged their empty mugs on the wooden table until Steed had them all refilled.

Beer was not a civilised drink, Steed reflected as he picked his way gently upstairs to bed. He decided to have a decent British drink before retiring for a good night's sleep. But when he reached his room he found that the bottle of Scotch had been stolen. You can't trust anybody in these foreign hotels.

The following morning he discovered a Continental "bug" fastened to the inside of the windowsill. He frowned. He had a long day ahead of him and he couldn't be late to meet Heinrich Toppler, otherwise he would have taught Herr Goldberg a lesson in professional etiquette.

Steed drove out for seven miles towards Herzog-standhaus and then left the car by the side of the road. He walked three miles across desolate hilly country until he reached another part of the massive lake. A deserted cove with not an ice-cream seller or beach hut in sight. Steed sat on the rocks and waited. It was seven minutes to eleven.

At eleven o'clock precisely a rowing boat came round the headland. Steed watched in alarm. The boat was being rowed by a lone girl of about twenty and as she saw him she waved. She was, Steed had to admit, rather fetching, but she wasn't Heinrich Toppler.

"Hello, you must be Steed." She jumped gracefully out of the boat and shook hands. "I'm Heidi Toppler."

She was blonde and in thirty years she might become square and forbidding. For the moment she was buxom, blue eyed and athletic.

"I was expecting Heinrich Toppler," he said carefully.

"He was my father, but he couldn't make it." She looked Steed in the eyes as she spoke and then decided she could trust him. "They murdered him six months ago when the N.P.D. discovered that he was a British agent during the war."

"I'm sorry."

"Thank you. I'll settle with them when the opportunity arises." She smiled, this time to show that Steed could rely on her. "They didn't find my father's radio or the code communication with London, so I decided to continue his work. Now, are we still in business?"

"Of course. I'm delighted to be working with you."

Things were looking up at last. Steed followed her along the side of the lake saying the usual things about her charming country and her delightful command of the English language. He even leapt nimbly up the side of a cliff and lifted her over a mountain stream.

"What," she asked abruptly, "will you do with the treasure if you do find it?"

Steed shrugged. "I'm not concerned with that. I expect the West German government will distribute it as they think fit. My only worry is to prevent a few troublesome people in England from getting their hands on it."

"Good," said Heidi. "I will show you what I know."

They went down a steep slope to the edge of the water. "Be careful," she called out, "it's dangerous along this ledge. Lean back against the rocks."

Steed did as he was told, and about thirty feet further along they reached an artificial cave.

"My father said this cave was formed by accident. They were trying to fill in the small inlet and instead they made a hole. Dynamite was tricky in those days. You had to be experienced with it."

The small cave was eighteen inches above water level and five feet in length. It contained eight human skeletons. "Good Lord," said Steed. They were male specimens, in perfect condition at the prime of life. Obviously they had been shot, because the rib cage of each was fractured where the heart had been. The bullets were still on the floor of the cave.

"They were soldiers," explained Heidi. "The odd buttons and metal pieces of their uniforms indicate that they were American soldiers, but my father said that was not so. They were S.S. men, and they were killed after they had brought the Nazi loot to this spot."

"Like pirates, shooting the men and burying them with the hidden treasure." He looked around at the stone walls. "All we have to do is find the treasure."

Heidi shrugged indifferently. "The trail stops here. It might be buried under five hundred tons of mountain, or it may be sunk at the bottom of the lake somewhere. We hadn't bothered much about that until I received your cable."

Steed examined the fall of rocks that had formed the far wall. As far as he could see it would take a gang of men and full quarrying equipment to shift that. And the lake would take days to search, assuming that frogmen didn't freeze to death in that water.

"Our chances of finding it," she said as if she were reading his mind, "are nil without a properly organised regiment of men."

He sat down and considered the matter. "Do you smoke panatellas?" he asked politely. She did. They ought to have brought a picnic lunch with them. "There are two alternatives," he said at last. "Either we can question every person who was within miles of this place in June 1945, or we can alert the nearby countryside so that anybody coming to this spot in the near future would find himself involved in a very public expedition."

Heidi agreed. "But there is nothing to be gained from questioning people about 1945. A few villagers know that the stuff was taken to Mount Klausenkopf, but they know nothing more. They think that it was taken away by American soldiers and smuggled into the U.S.A."

"Whereas it was brought here and the men who brought it are dead." Steed sighed. "I wonder who arranged for it to be brought."

There was no answer to that. Heidi's father had browsed around many years ago and learnt nothing more. The only thing was to carry out plan number two, and alert the entire village of Zwergeren. "If we go back to my boat we can be there in half an hour."

Steed spent a pastoral afternoon rowing on the lake with Heidi, eating rural food in the village inn and drinking the local wine. During the course of three hours they gossiped with police and publican and anyone standing nearby. It was a small village and it was simple enough to ensure that every inhabitant heard the news within a few hours of their departure.

"Herr Steed is a British Intelligence agent hunting for the Reichsbank loot," she told a bank manager they met in the street.

Steed shook hands sheepishly.

"He thinks he has found it in that cave a few kilometres along the shore..."

When the bank manager had looked suitably impressed and gone on his way Steed tried to remonstrate with Heidi. "It's a little ingenuous, if you know what I mean, to introduce me as a British Intelligence agent."

"But Herr Schon is secretary of the local N.P.D. He was in the S.S. during the war."

"And what do you hope he'll do now?"

"I thought he might try to kill you."

"Huh. And I was just beginning to fall in love."

Heidi seized his hands and looked immensely serious. "I'm sure you're so much more clever than my father. He didn't really believe that anyone would kill him, and when they took him out one early morning to shoot him he was so taken up with dying honourably that he let them do it."

Steed had a feeling he was being got at, but he smiled blandly and assured her that he himself believed in protesting vigorously when people waved guns in his direction.

"If we're lucky, you see, they'll come after you, and you will revenge my father's death."

He put his arm round her shoulder. "I'll see what can be done." He had known Heinrich Toppler well, a good man as well as the father of a wildly attractive girl. "I ought to find out who killed him, if only to stop up the leak between London and the N.P.D."

She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

Steed blinked slightly. "You live over the other side of the lake -"

"I'll stay with you until this is all over. You might need some help." She brushed aside his modest protests. "I told mother that I'd be staying with you until every one of those murderers is dead."

"Oh well, that's settled then."

She looked such a peaceful girl, brought up on all the health-giving vitamins, smelling slightly of new-mown grass with a dash of honey. But as he watched her run happily up the mountainside on the way back to his car he had to remember that she was more like a leopard. Savage beneath the feline grace and probably deadly.

"I thought there weren't many of you left in England now," she called at one point. "Aren't they all pop stars and realist actors since the war?"

"We're hanging on," said Steed. "I have a cousin and we fight shoulder to shoulder."

He drove the Volkswagen at an average speed of seventy-three miles an hour all the way back, which was pretty reckless in these alpine regions, to show that James Dean hadn't been the first chap to handle a car dangerously. But that was a waste of time. It scared the life out of Steed, but Heidi sat with her arm flapping out of the window talking about Bavarian legends.

He said "Really?" and "Good Lord" occasionally, but he had to concentrate

on the road.

"Yes, really. There's even a legend that Hitler is still alive, and that he'll return and lead Germany to victory when the people are ready to receive him."

"That sounds a familiar myth. Christ and all that. Every religion has its equivalent. But if Hitler were still alive he'd be rather old."

"No, he'd be 79. At that age Adenauer was a young man and Winston Churchill was still Prime Minister of Britain."

He said "By George yes," and swerved violently to avoid a mad motorist who was coming at them as if this were a race track. He almost shouted something about the fool being on the wrong side of the road. But this was the continent.

"Who is this?" demanded Herr Kurtmann.

"Fraulein Toppler. She's helping me to find the Nazi hoard by the lake over there. Would you put her in the room opposite mine?"

Steed found that Goldberg had put another microphone in his room, this time on the inside of the picture rail. Which suited Steed's purpose very well. A few words in that microphone might be worth as much as a broadcast to the whole German nation. He beckoned Heidi into his room with hushes and gestures to be quiet.

"What is it?" she asked brightly. "Are you going to seduce me?"

"Certainly not. I never seduce young ladies before I've had supper. It's only six o'clock in the evening."

She laughed. "I think a pop star would go without his supper. Are you married?"

"No." He waved cautiously towards the hidden microphone. "I prefer the open air life. That exhilarating hour we spent rowing round the Nazi treasure cave -"

"That I spent rowing. You sat in the boat and stared at my legs."

Please, Herr Goldberg, don't misunderstand this conversation! "I was thinking how sad that so much money will be turned over to the government by the weekend."

"I really think you're shy!"

"Ssh!" He bent towards her ear to explain but she kissed him. The bitch. "What do you think you are," he demanded irritably, "a beautiful German spy or something?" He grabbed her by the hand and led her firmly out of the room. "Let's go down to the bar. I need a drink."

The tinkle of feminine laughter brought her nearer to being upended over a man's knee than she'd been since the age of seven, but Steed restrained himself. Always the gentleman.

"My dear Heidi," he explained when they were downstairs, "there was a

microphone in that bloody room. Kurtmann! We'll have a bottle of that foul German brandy. And two glasses." He turned back to her. "There are some things that we wish to broadcast, and some things that have to be done discreetly."

"I'm sorry."

He'd believe that when she decided whether to laugh or burst. But eventually he smiled himself. After all, if her plan worked this might be his last night on earth. No need to spoil it by standing on dignity. He led her over to a cosy recess and proposed a toast to Bavarian women.

"I don't really think of myself as Bavarian," she said. "I was educated in Paris, and then I went to a school in Switzerland for two years. My father was rather suspicious of German schools."

"I knew there was something false in your simple peasant pose. And here was I beginning to think I had come to grips with your country at last." He sighed. "Just another cosmopolitan. I hope you won't start asking me about swinging London."

"All right. If you promise not to ask me why the German people are innately militaristic."

"That's a bargain."

Later they went for a walk by the side of the lake, and this time it didn't seem gothic and the mountains looked serene in the moonlight. The massive silence made Steed feel that perhaps all time was standing still and they, high up in an unreal village in the tirolian alps, were experiencing something that people down there in Europe wouldn't understand.

"It must be the brandy," said Steed, "or perhaps it's late in the evening. You can't really be the most exciting girl in the world."

She laid her head on his shoulder so that the stray hairs blew in the breeze and tickled his nose. "Maybe you're the most exciting man."

"Ah yes, that must be it." Her mouth tasted of warm, slightly sweet white wine, almost tasteless, intoxicating, damp and Heidi. He pressed her body against him and felt the way her hips fitted against his thighs. She was the most gloriously romantic animal, he thought incredulously; he'd throw that microphone out of the window as soon as they got back to the hotel.

"What are you thinking?" she asked softly.

"I was thinking what a waste it would have been if I'd sent my partner out here instead. There are some things Mrs. Peel just doesn't appreciate."

They walked back slowly along the ancient cobbled streets and Steed told her about the problems of being a literary gentleman, about grammar and human destiny. But, he quoted, "How can I, that girl standing there, My attention fix On

Roman or on Russian Or on Spanish politics?" It didn't sound quite right, but Yeats was supposed to be a lyrical poet. "Tell me about yourself," he said quickly.

"Here I am."

"What are you doing here?"

She leaned against him as they walked and her left breast rested against the bottom of his ribs. "I suppose I become involved in all this because of my father. He believed in things like freedom, and he thought he knew what that meant. He was a lawyer, and he objected to National Socialism because it treated the law as an instrument. The Nazis did what they liked with the law." She smiled. "My father thought the law was an ideal condition that people and the state should aspire to. He was an idealist."

"And what are you?"

"I don't know. I don't believe in the law or in National Socialism or any of those things. If I hadn't taken to you I wouldn't have bothered to help you very much. I believe in my father, and I believe in you while you're here with me, and I'll believe in my husband when I marry and in my children..."

Steed decided to resign his job and marry instantly. Then he decided to give it some thought. You can't throw away a whole career just because you're writing a book about it. He looked at the people hanging around the inn as they went through to the stairs. He would always have the instincts of an under-cover agent.

"Who were all those people hanging around outside?" asked Steed.

"Who cares?"

True. He was feeling rather tragic now as he led Heidi into his room. The transitory nature of beauty, the fleeting glimpses man gets of an ideal. And then you go upstairs, dismantle a microphone and tell the girl you love her.

"I love you," he said as they closed the door. Nobody ever takes that one seriously. "And if I burst into tears when we've made love, just take no notice. It's only because I envy the blond young ski-ing champion whom you'll marry next year."

"Or the brandy," she murmured.

"Yes."

She seemed to know what he meant, and she squeezed against him to be reassured. Her passion was partly because she was human and Steed was a man, but she needed him to care. "Tell me what I'm doing here," she whispered.

But he decided not to.

"I suppose we always want everything to last for ever."

That stuff about love being a glimpse into eternity.

"Actually," she said, "it's the woman who's supposed to burst into tears. Will you reassure me then? I've always thought how terrible it would be if the man I loved turned over and went to sleep. Will you tell me you love me?"

He nodded.

Then she turned off the light. "I'm not very experienced at this sort of thing."

Steed took her in his arms. He kissed her eyelids and held her shoulders to prove that he was looking after her. The buttons on her blouse undid at his touch and her skirt fell unzipped to the floor. She stood close, as if she was afraid he would look.

"It's all right. Look at me."

She shivered, but she looked up and her wide blue eyes still seemed to be smiling.

She grinned, as if she had won a concession, took off his tie and undid his shirt buttons, and then went over to the bed. The moon was shining weakly through the window, and Steed watched her with mounting appreciation as she slipped out of her briefs and threw her brassiere across the chair.

He paused, arrested for a moment by the silhouette of her full breasts and the rounded stomach, the curve of her thighs, and then as she ran back across the room to him he received her. The penny-brown nipples were already standing out with eagerness.

"I want you," he murmured.

And then the shot rang out. The sound of shattered glass and Heidi screamed. Steed dropped to the floor with the girl beneath him. But he soon realised from the moans in the next room that it was Goldberg who had been shot and not them. There was a peculiar gurgle that meant death from a punctured lung, and Goldberg was gurgling.

"Dammit," he said bitterly.

"Where are you going?"

"Well, I mean, the fellow next door has been killed. You know, duty and all that. You'd better nip across to your room."

"I hate you!"

"Nonsense."

But she threw one of his shoes at him as he went out of the door so perhaps she did. That was the trouble with women in this game. Like Steed said, a spy should never get involved. He would go back and apologise afterwards, but he knew it wouldn't be the same.

7

Irgun takes a hand

Goldberg was lying on the floor by the window when Steed reached him. He was fully dressed and extremely dead.

"Telephone the police," he called to the landlord. "Herr Goldberg has been murdered."

The landlord had been running frantically up the stairs in his nightshirt and without altering speed he ran frantically back downstairs.

The shot had been fired from across the street while Goldberg had been admiring the stars. The building opposite was a watchmaker's and there were no lights on. There was no-one down on the pavement, of course. The knot of people who had been lurking half an hour ago had dispersed.

Steed helped himself to Goldberg's wallet and leather address book. On reflection, he wouldn't be needing the Scotch any more, so Steed went back to his own room with a small compensation for the man's untimely death.

The police came eventually and took statements from everyone at the inn. "I was undressing for bed when I heard a shot and so I ducked. I didn't see a thing."

Kurtmann had been asleep.

"I was in bed," claimed Heidi.

The police went away to file yet another unsolved crime. They hadn't believed Steed's claim to be writing a book on Germany, but at least they hadn't arrested him. They had been too preoccupied with staring at Heidi.

Steed retired again for the night feeling that an old friend had been lost. He had almost begun to enjoy the exchange of microphones and the battle of the whisky bottle. He sat on his bed and examined the poor chap's effects.

There was about DM200 in notes, a driving licence issued in Tel Aviv, a few club cards and a hotel bill which showed that he had stayed until last Wednesday morning at the Victoria Hotel in Swindon. Well, people put up at hotels in Swindon every day.

The leather address book showed that Goldberg had many friends throughout the world. He even knew David Simmons of Rose Cottage, Berniston, Wilts. Steed sipped a large whisky and considered this surprisingly specific link with his own concerns. There was only one address in Einsiedeln. Someone called Fritz Neufeld.

After the second whisky it seemed highly unlikely that anyone in this part of the world should murder Goldberg. If the fellow had been a Nazi the only people after him would be Steed and Heidi, who had alibis. And if he had been anti-Nazi they would have more likely murdered Steed. No, the only solution Steed could think of was that it was a deliberate plot to prevent him from keeping Heidi warm tonight. The bastards. And to think that this could be Steed's last night on earth.

Christ! Steed saw suddenly that the bullet had been meant for him. Heidi had set him up, as they knew. A lone British agent staying at the inn. So the murder squad had turned up and killed the lone agent. And Steed, in his room with Heidi like a couple of newly weds had escaped because...

He hurried across the passage and banged on Heidi's door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me."

"Drop dead."

Steed turned away, smiled fatuously at the police guard standing outside Goldberg's room, and went back to finish the whisky. He wouldn't escape because of Heidi the next time they came.

After a thoroughly bad night's sleep Steed was woken up too early by Heidi. "Good morning, I've brought you a pot of black coffee," she said cheerfully. "I thought you might need it."

"Thanks. I wish you wouldn't bounce up and down on the bed."

She laughed. "You have a hangover?"

"No."

"That is good. Because we have work to do. During the night I was thinking of a way to find the people who killed Herr Goldberg." She poured him the coffee. "You see, they obviously meant to kill you -"

Steed groaned. "I thought beautiful women were supposed to be stupid."

"My small brother is twelve and he will spend the rest of the week on a fishing expedition near Zwergern with his friend." She showed Steed a rather clever charm round her neck with a miniature radio inside where the portrait would be. "He will call us when the fun starts. That leaves us free to check up on the people who were drinking here late last night."

"So while I'm cleaning my teeth you could ask -"

"I already have." She took a slip of paper from her shoulder bag. "Herr Kurtmann finds me irresistible. These are all the names he can remember, and the three at the bottom were talking about you."

Steed glanced at the names. Hans Bohme, Friedl Eisenschiemal and Fritz Neufeld. "Do you know any of these people?"

"No. I live across the other side -"

"I've heard it all. What did Kurtmann tell you about Goldberg?"

"Nothing. It seems that Herr Goldberg met no-one and kept to himself. He went out every morning before you woke up and returned every evening at nightfall. He was a mystery."

Steed put the coffee cup back on the bedside table. "All right, I'll be getting dressed while you find out all you can about Fritz Neufeld."

Neufeld was a local doctor. He lived in a large house half a mile from the village. He was sixty-three and nothing was known of his politics. But he wasn't Jewish; he attended the Catholic church on the minimum number of saint days required of a devout man.

"All right," said Steed. "I want you to go out and see him. Say that you're a friend of Isaac Goldberg, that Goldberg is dead and you need his help to find the Nazi treasure. You know the style of thing. Assume that he and Goldberg were in this together." Steed patted her on the arm. "I'll see you back here for lunch."

When the girl was gone Steed put through a phone call to Tel Aviv. "A personal call to General Ben Halle," he said, "and it's urgent." The operator said yes, she would ring him back. Steed lit a panatella and waited. He couldn't get *The Times* in this God-forsaken place so he read the *Neue Zeiler Zeitung* instead. But the trouble with foreign crosswords was that only a bloody foreigner would be able to do them.

"Mr. Steed," shouted Kurtmann eagerly. "Tel Aviv coming through!"

Half the village was probably eager. He could imagine the telephone exchange crowded out with listeners.

"Hello, Jacob. This is Steed. John Steed. Yes, I'm marvellous. Having a wonderful time in Bavaria just at this moment. Beautiful spot right next to Walchensee. Yes, yes, you must have read about it. Ha ha. As a matter of fact I'm pretty certain one of your men was staying in the same hotel. Name of Goldberg. But he's dead now..."

At four o'clock that afternoon Steed went for an invigorating walk up Mount Klausenkopf. He went about two miles and when he had established that no-one was following him he climbed back through the sparse woods until he came to a large house. He leaned his umbrella carefully against a tree and peered at each window through his binoculars. The house appeared to be empty, but that couldn't be. Heidi Toppler had to be in there somewhere.

Steed blamed himself. The girl was inexperienced. He shouldn't have sent her on such a dangerous errand. He suppressed the unworthy thought that a mild fright would serve her right. No no. St. George and all that. He sat carefully beside a clump of bushes so that he could see the house and the lane to the

village, and he waited. He ate a pack of salmon sandwiches and drank a little sickly brandy from the flask in his umbrella handle. He even tried again with the wretched crossword.

He had learned a lot from his talk with old Jacob Ben Halle. He should have guessed before that Goldberg was working for the Irgun. But somehow it's only when they do something like kidnap Eichmann that one remembers they exist. In Britain any way. Yet it was obvious that if anyone was interested in the new Fascism it would be the Irgun. Steed had crossed swords with them a few times in 1947 when they were using terrorist methods against the British in a utopian effort to create a Jewish state in Palestine. And nobody had been more pleased than he when they succeeded. Enemies like Jacob Ben Halle were best either dead or made into friends.

It was safe to assume therefore, that Fritz Neufeld was an enemy. Someone the Irgun traced, although Jacob had been non-committal about that. "Let's just say that he isn't a friend of mine, liebchen," he'd said.

Neufeld's house was a luxurious chalet with nearly all the rooms on the ground floor. There were perhaps two bedrooms perched on the roof. And the whole thing had that affected timber roofing one sees on those things where a man comes out if it's sunny and a woman comes out to indicate storms. Steed waited until it was dark and then decided to move. Time to rescue the damsel in distress. There was about one hundred yards of ground to be traversed without hitting trip wires, falling into a booby trap or being seen.

Steed picked up his umbrella, adjusted his bowler hat and straightened the discreet tweed jacket of his suit. "Geschick," he murmured to himself. He spent the next 9.6 seconds covering the hundred yards to the side wall. Perhaps it was something to do with the mountain air but it took him a little longer after all.

Without waiting to find out whether he'd been seen Steed climbed up the drainpipe onto the roof. Both the gutter and the umbrella handle stood his weight without difficulty, but the timber creaked slightly when he trod on it. He had to lie across eight or nine struts and then wriggle to reach the bedroom window. Steed peered carefully through the glass. As far as he could see it was empty.

One of the complex propelling pencils in his pocket was useful for this sort of thing. He drew a quick circle with the diamond head and then unscrewed it to produce a tiny rubber suction pad. Steed pushed the pad against the glass, and then tapped until the glass came away on the end of the pencil. He put his hand through the aperture and flicked open the catch.

So far, success. He crept across somebody's bedroom, brushed down his suit with the clothes brush on the dressing table and then slowly opened the door. It gave on to a landing which overlooked a barn of a living room but again there

was nobody around. There was nobody in the next upstairs room either so Steed went down into the main hall. He found somebody in the kitchen. An ape-like handyman was sitting at the scrubbed wooden table eating black bread. He threw the chair at Steed and broke three plates, then he advanced on him with the bread knife.

"I say," said Steed, "for all you know I might be the priest selling indulgences."

The ape wasn't impressed with such fine distinctions. He threw the knife and it quivered gruesomely in the woodwork.

Steed waved the umbrella and pressed the switch blade release. The ape blinked in disbelief and clutched his arm. There was blood pouring from his deltoid muscle. Then he screamed, in anger, or in fear because his arm hung limply by his side. Steed picked up the wooden mallet that Mrs. Neufeld used to make her steaks tender and hit the fellow on the head with it. Then he continued the search of the house.

He found a basement underneath the stairs, and below the coal cellar was a small room in which Heidi was imprisoned. Steed just had time to grab the ape guard and drag him down the flights of stairs when a car drew up outside the house. Steed closed the doors, hit the ape on the head again in case of trouble, and went over to Heidi.

She was tied up by the hands to two rings in the wall. When Steed turned the lights on and went over to release her he could tell from her eyes that it was only what she expected. The bitch wasn't in the least impressed. But he had the satisfaction, when he cut the ropes round her wrists, of having her fall limply into his arms.

"Are you all right?" he whispered.

"Am I all right? I've been here for six hours. Of course I'm not all right." She smiled to take the sting out of her criticism. "Where have you been all this time?"

"I was trying to do the crossword in a German newspaper. They really are incredibly difficult."

"My father said that in many ways the English are a frivolous nation."

Steed picked up the ape by the scruff of the neck and told Heidi to help tie him to the ring in the wall. "Must have somebody down here, otherwise they'll notice you're gone."

"We must stay," said Heidi, "until we've killed them. I'm sure that these are the men who murdered my father."

Steed turned out the light and led the way back upstairs.

"Anyway, thank you for rescuing me."

"It's all part of being British."

She kissed him gently while they hid in the tiny doorway. Steed murmured yes yes, think nothing of it, and bent down to peer through the crack by the latch. All right, I love you too. Be quiet! "Anyway, what happened?" he whispered.

"Dr. Neufeld seemed to know who I was. He listened for a few minutes and then told that man you've almost killed to put me in the cellar."

Steed smiled. "When this is all over you must come to London for some basic training. You should have incapacitated them both."

"I'd like to see you -"

"With any luck you will."

He could see through the latch that a flat, square Bavarian with short trousers and a feather in his cap was playing host to four other men. Three rather insipid toughs who would only be dangerous if they were winning. And Captain Hayburn. They seemed to be discussing the fact that Ernst was missing.

"Really old man, I don't see that it matters where your manservant has got to."

"No? So I'll tell you. We've had spies in this part of the mountains. In the last six months we've had so many spies you'd think it was a tourist industry. The man Toppler was taken care of, and then the Irgun came over. We've had to deal with six Israelis since January, the last one died last night, and now Toppler's daughter turned up. Do you know what this would mean if the police began to take it seriously? I don't mind the odd elimination, but I'm not Murder Incorporated. I want you to remove the treasure as soon as possible, I want you then to tell the world that it is gone, and then we can all settle down in Bavaria to a normal life."

Colonel Hayburn laughed. "I'd say that you're a frightened man, Fritz. What do you mean, a normal life? Is the N.P.D. a normal way of life? You're heading for excitement, old man, and if you don't like it you'd better retire."

Steed could see Dr. Neufeld turning scarlet. "However, if you don't mind, I'll have a look at my prisoner and see that nothing's gone wrong."

Hayburn rubbed his hands together and said that he'd enjoy a look himself. "There's nothing like a beautiful prisoner."

The three insipid characters went into the kitchen to forage while Neufeld ushered Hayburn to the cellar door. Steed smiled briefly to reassure Heidi and then crouched on the floor. He waved her clear of the stairs. As the door opened he sprang upwards, pulling Neufeld off his feet and in the same movement pitching him down the twenty-three steps into a hundredweight of coal. Then he moved quickly forward to deal with Hayburn. It was done in less than two seconds. Hayburn was still reaching for his gun when Steed thrust the blade of

his umbrella towards his throat.

"One move and I'll cut your throat."

Hayburn didn't move.

"Heidi, take his gun."

She did, and the three men ran in from the kitchen in time to put their hands up.

"Right," said Steed, "keep them covered while I fetch Neufeld."

He found the doctor still sprawled on the heap of coal. He was unarmed. Steed hauled him groaning back up to the ground floor. Then the five men sat in a row on the chic Swiss chaise longue. They were protesting slightly but even Hayburn admitted defeat. He had tried the old boy line and now he was denying all knowledge of Heidi's imprisonment.

"I only arrived in Germany at lunch time," he explained.

"Where were you on November 23rd last year?" Heidi demanded.

"Good Lord, I don't know."

Heidi was holding the gun in a highly business-like manner. "Show me your passport."

The passport showed that Hayburn hadn't been in Germany since 1961 so Heidi seemed to lose interest in him. "Guess what those three monkeys are called," she said to Steed.

"Bohme, Eisenschiemal, and A. N. Other."

"Yes. They are all murderers!"

Steed realised that Heidi was in a dangerous mood. He said reassuringly he was glad they'd found them. "But first there are some things I wish to know." Neufeld was still slumped unhappily at the end of the row, preoccupied with a collar bone which he said was broken. Steed lifted up the man's head.

"Where is the Nazi loot buried, Dr. Neufeld?"

"I can't tell you."

Steed shrugged. "I think you ought to tell me. Fraulein Toppler will kill you otherwise."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Perhaps we can remind you. Last November you murdered the young lady's father and she has come here with the express intention of revenging him." He sat languidly in a comfortable armchair. "Colonel Hayburn has come here with the express intention of taking away your treasure. Do you remember? Now: I want you to tell me where it is or Heidi will kill you."

"I am not at liberty -"

A deafening shot stopped his words in mid-sentence and Herr Bohme slumped on to the floor. It was an accurate aim and the man died in seconds.

Steed raised an eyebrow in surprise. "I think you'd better tell me."

"I say, old man," Hayburn interrupted, "is there any need to kill us all? Neufeld's the only man in the world who knows where the stuff is hidden."

"It's Neufeld we're trying to persuade. What's known as moral persuasion."

There was a pause, and then Heidi shot A. N. Other. He screamed, and died messily with blood foaming from a hole in his throat. The gruesome business unnerved Herr Eisenschiemal. He knelt and began pleading as the third shot rang out.

"If Neufeld is the only man in the world who knows," said Heidi, "we would solve the whole problem if we killed him."

"True," said Steed, "but -"

He didn't finish the sentence. The fourth bullet was tearing through Neufeld's skull before he had thought of a way to stop Heidi from executing him. Steed took the gun from her hand. "Mission accomplished," he murmured.

Hayburn was sitting alone on the chaise longue with perspiration running down his face like rainwater. He was shaking, too frightened even to speak.

"I think now I shall resign from your secret service," Heidi said cheerfully. "I can marry a blond ski-ing champion and have six children. Will you come to my wedding? I'd like you to give the bride away."

Steed smiled sadly. That was the trouble with good women in important jobs - they were always leaving to get married. "It will be a great honour. Do you know any ski-ing champions yet?"

"Well no. You must look after me for a day or so."

Steed put an arm round her waist. "Let's go."

"What about your English colonel?"

"Leave him where he is. When he recovers his nerve he'll cruise back to England. I'll deal with him then." He looked at the craven, defeated Hayburn. "What about that spirit, colonel? Are you still trying to bring it out?"

Steed and Heidi laughed. They left him staring at his knees and went off down the hill. The dark mountain road was beautiful again and the village looked like a toy model below them with its flickering lights reflected in the lake. Steed almost felt like trying to yodel.

Heidi was trembling slightly now. The reaction against her ordeal was setting in, and she needed to lean on Steed's square shoulders. He murmured the comforting things about it being a nasty business they were employed in and said that her father would be proud of her. She smiled, pleased that Steed accepted her on equal terms. Her hair waved and tickled his nose again. As they reached the edge of the village Steed wondered when he ought to return to England.

They had to jump aside as a Mercedes came roaring down the hill behind them. The headlamps were blazing and the car was going too fast. As Steed waved his hand and shouted about crazy foreign drivers a shot rang out. He saw Hayburn's white face in the car as it swerved violently and then sped on towards Mittenwald. Behind him Heidi had grunted. She was crouched on the ground, whimpering as Steed realised she had been shot.

The bullet had entered just above the right breast and she died almost instantly in Steed's arms. He stayed kneeling on the ground, rocking her gently and telling her softly she'd be all right. But she was dead. She never would have those children after all.

"We must be iron-willed!"

Emma went to see Harris again on the Friday with her plans for streamlining the Werewolves in her briefcase. She was working on the assumption that efficiency was the important thing, to work her way into Harris's confidence. She would think up a way of sabotaging the organisation later.

Herr Harris was upstairs in his study. Emma followed his wife Eva to the door, and then went in by herself. "My wife," said Harris, "is a simple woman. She doesn't understand politics." He was standing over a table in the corner as if he had been there for hours. "Do you see what this is?" he asked.

It looked like a map. The table had bumps and furrows and coloured areas. Suddenly she realised that it was a scale model of Russia. And the lead soldiers represented armies in a re-enactment of old battles.

"I could have conquered Russia," said Herr Harris thickly. "You see, this is Stalingrad. These are the German army outside the city. Come over here, my dear. Do you know why the invasion stopped at Stalingrad?"

Emma said no. But she assumed it had been indecision on Hitler's part. He had diverted too many soldiers south to conquer the oil and the heavy industry, and he had diverted another third of the attack northwards. For this reason the invading force had waited outside the city throughout the winter.

"I should have pressed on," said Harris.

"Quite."

"The Russians had several months that winter to train an army and build up their munitions industry." He jabbed his finger on Stalingrad. "That's where the Second World War was lost."

Harris continued staring at the map for nearly five minutes. Then he smiled and took Emma by the arm. "We must be decisive," he said. "Decisive and iron-willed!" He led her to the sofa and they sat down. "Now show me your plans to make the Werewolves into a fighting force."

The Werewolves were intended as a private army to be used for internal maintenance of order, for terrorism and as an organ to involve the youth of Britain. Like the Brown Shirts had been, or the S.S. or the Red Guards. Emma wondered whether the things that had happened in Nazi Germany would ever have occurred if Himmler had been a woman. Its membership was only two

hundred, and she doubted whether all two hundred would be prepared to break the law in such a serious manner as open revolution.

But open revolution was the intention. Half the Werewolves were in Hayburn's regiment, so they were fully trained soldiers and had access to firearms and all military equipment. When the revolt took place, on July 8th, there would be serious upheaval. More serious, Emma reflected wryly, than the General Strike in 1926. Perhaps the last man in England to think on this scale had been Oliver Cromwell.

"As I see it," said Emma, "you have two fighting instruments. The Werewolves and Colonel Hayburn's regiment. I don't understand why you haven't separated them. Now my idea -"

"There isn't time to separate them. The Werewolves as they exist will have to begin the revolt on Saturday morning."

"I don't believe it."

Harris nodded sombrely. "Colonel Hayburn has bungled his mission in Germany. He didn't bring back the seven million pounds that we needed, and he failed to establish a treaty of alliance with the N.P.D."

"What a shame," said Emma.

"The fool! He'll pay for this when the battle is over. He destroyed months of careful preparation. Now we must act instantly or else abandon everything."

Emma looked surprised. "How did this happen?"

"He allowed the British secret service to find out exactly what we are doing. When Hayburn arrived that man Steed was already in Walchensee." Harris paced up and down in mounting fury. "The most important contact we had in Germany is dead, the money is gone, and Hayburn has arrived back here with the British Intelligence people after him. Our only chance is to fight it out."

"We shall lose."

"We shall lose if we wait."

"So that's that."

Harris glared at her, and again Emma found herself flinching from his eyes. "You don't understand the theory of eternal ice. The principle on which civilisation is based is that each step forward arises out of destruction. Civilisation as we know it may be destroyed and the human race may be slaughtered, but then the super-man will emerge. There can be no surrender, and no mercy. We shall either win, or we shall precipitate such destruction that nothing will ever be the same again. That way progress is made. Look at Greece, Rome, all the ancient civilisations. They moved forward until they were destroyed, and out of their ruins arose the next civilisation. I am quite ready to destroy this world. It will be for the sake of history."

Emma still tried to reason with the man. "Surely we haven't the power to destroy -"

"Power is illusion!" he shouted. "In 1939 Germany didn't have the power to fight France, but luckily France surrendered. In 1938 we couldn't have beaten Czechoslovakia, but the British wouldn't allow Czechoslovakia to fight. The important thing is to surprise our enemies and to attack with supreme confidence. That way we are invincible. We attack on Saturday at nine o'clock."

"Does Colonel Hayburn agree to this?"

Harris laughed. He had a sense of humour after all. "He thinks it is his idea. The man Steed has enough evidence against Hayburn to have him gaoled for life."

An even better joke occurred to him. "And I understand there is a personal issue. Hayburn killed the man's girl friend, so now he is terrified that he will be killed in revenge. Ha ha ha. You see, what has Colonel Hayburn to lose? He is finished. But if our revolution is successful he may become nearly as powerful as Goering was. Nearly as powerful. One doesn't make the same mistake twice."

Emma went back to Throgmorton Hall feeling slightly confused. This sort of thing doesn't happen in England. It happens nearly every other month in places like Indonesia and China, Egypt or Jordan. Even in Rhodesia. But in England - no, she couldn't imagine it. So few people in England could imagine a bloody revolution that such a thing was unimaginable.

She drove through the narrow country lanes and passed a herd of cows on their way to milking. It was so peaceful. Among all this order she could no more imagine change than she could imagine dying. But people die every day. Nothing lasts for ever except the desire to think that life is eternal. But no, it had to be a nightmare.

When she reached Throgmorton Hall she found three soldiers posted in the grounds. They saluted her as she sped past them. Which was disconcerting. There was another man sitting in the entrance hall, and when Emma came in he sprang to attention.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm your personal bodyguard, Mrs. Peel."

Cynthia was thrilled to bits because her father had a personal bodyguard as well. "The house is absolutely vibrating with virile young soldiers," she explained delightedly. "Apparently there's going to be some kind of civil war. Isn't it exciting?"

"Wildly," said Emma.

9

"Get it out of your system"

Steed stopped off in London for the evening on his way back to Wiltshire. He was feeling hungover and depressed, and there was only one cure for a condition like that. He looked up his old friend Archie Newman. A bachelor till the day he died and a man who drank only in moderation; he went on regular cures whenever he ran out of money. Archie Newman had been a close friend of Steed's since they had both been sentenced to death in Jerusalem.

"I mean, I'm not affected personally by her death," said Steed.

"Good Lord no."

"But, you know, philosophically I was a bit saddened. All that beauty going to waste. Do you know what I mean?"

"Absolutely." He waved to the waiter and asked for another bottle of brandy. "I feel exactly the same way when I walk down the King's Road. All those marvellous little dollies going to waste, and their palpitating little hearts will never know that it was me they were searching for. Do you know, Steed, there are thousands of women searching for love, and thousands more in jobs that they hate. They all wander about saying that they're looking for something in life. And it's me. I'm here all the time, waiting to give their lives meaning. But they won't be told. Women are funny things."

Steed knocked back his seventh brandy. "You're a thick, insensitive type."

"My dear old chap, you're not in love, are you?"

"No"

"Tired of life? Did you know that old Buffy St. Claire put his head in a gas oven last Friday? Must have been a pretty large gas oven." He dispensed the balm with an expression that made Steed think of a St. Bernard dog. "Fancy putting your head in the oven. Must have given his wife a shock when she went to take out the joint."

Every time he saw Archie Newman Steed hated him more than the last time. Seeing Archie was like visiting the dentist, it hurt, it undermined one's faith in human goodness and it brought out the sadist in Archie.

"I didn't really mean to mention Heidi," he said lamely.

"No no, old man. Glad you did. Get it out of your system. Did I ever tell you about that Fraulein I picked up in Hamburg?"

Steed glowered. "By the time we've emptied this bottle I shall be asking you to step outside!"

"Better not, old fellow. Last time you asked me outside you were thumped pretty heartily."

"By the police, protecting your canine face."

Archie was hurt. "I nearly married the girl, you know. She had long brown hair, like Brigitte Bardot. But when the war was over they shaved her head because she slept with me. I broke my heart over that. Took the vow for nearly a week."

Steed smiled affectionately. "It's hell sometimes, isn't it?"

"By God yes. On the eighth day I went off and got plastered. Is this your -?"

Steed considered. "Second day."

"By God."

"We all rush around protecting people, and they get killed. We protect countries and they have wars which most of the politicians wanted anyway. It gives one pause. The army exists to increase our safety, and in fact it increases the danger of attack. I'm supposed to be protecting Germany or Swindon or somewhere from the threat of Fascism. But I doubt whether many people would mind if the N.P.D. got into power."

"Swindon? Do they have the vote -?"

"Little place near Birmingham."

"I heard about it on the news tonight. A few chaps in the Wiltshire County Regiment have locked themselves in the barracks or something. I had to laugh. I mean, if you're going to stage a revolt, at least you should do it in London. What do they want, independence for the south west?" He laughed immoderately. "Independence for Wessex!" Ha ha ha.

Steed rose unsteadily to his feet. "What did you say?"

"Wessex. It was one of those kingdoms, like Mercia -"

He felt sick so he sat down again. "Silly bastards. What do they think they'll achieve? There was a revolt like that in Aldershot a few years ago, and what happened?"

"Absolutely," said Archie Newman. "But this is more fun. There's a woman leading the rebellion. And they say that Lord Throgmorton is behind it. You know, the revolt of the upper classes and this lord trying to wrest the government from the mayor of Swindon."

Steed shrugged. "It's too improbable for words. I mean, listen, Archie. What would you say if I suggested to you that all this Fascism and stuff today was organised throughout Europe by one man? No no, listen. Supposing Adolf Hitler hadn't died in that bunker in April 1945. Supposing he was still alive -"

"I'd say bunkum, old man."

"Yes." Steed thought for a moment. "Yes, so would I." He poured out another round. "By the way, who's this woman leading the rebellion?"

Archie Newman chuckled. "Rather a fetching young thing according to the news. Red head with stacks of money called Orange Peel or something."

Steed laughed. "Emma Peel?"

"Yes. Probably."

"Oh well, there's nothing to worry about. Let's finish this bottle and then go back to my place for a nightcap."

Two hours later Steed and Archie Newman staggered out of the Jack of Hearts and fell into a waiting taxi. They were in the middle of an argument about love, and whether you have to be seventeen to appreciate it. Steed had to admit that he was slightly under the influence of brandy because his point was that when you're in love you feel seventeen anyway.

The taxi driver said "Oy oy, what's all this debauchery?" and headed Archie Newman out again.

"Excuse me, my man," pronounced Steed, "but we are travelling together."

"Shoulder to shoulder," yelled Archie Newman.

"Sorry, guy," said the taxi man, "but His Nibs only gave me *your* name."

Oh God. It was Benson, turning up at the worst possible time as always and dragging Steed off to a secret assignation with his boss. "My dear Benson," said Steed unhappily, "I'm tired, depressed and hardly in the mood to meet General Lawrence. Couldn't it wait until morning?"

"Sorry, Mr. S. but His Nibs was most particular. Fetch that young tearaway Steed, he says, and make sure that he isn't either in tears or singing songs about Dublin when he gets here." Benson chuckled happily.

"I resign," said Steed.

"Rubbish, Mr. S. You'll feel different in the morning."

"Okay, but tonight I resign."

Benson drew up outside the Sauna Baths and Health Centre in Swiss Cottage. "Open 24 Hours a Day," proclaimed the advertisement.

"I've already told you," said Steed. "I've had enough."

After the hot shower he stood angrily in the cold shower and then went through a system of baths that grew hotter and hotter until he felt that he would either faint or float away. Then he was packed protesting into another cold shower by three burly attendants. "I resign," he shouted weakly. But nobody paid any attention.

In the next room His Nibs was waiting patiently. He waited until Steed was lying on the couch and then asked him how he felt.

"Fine," said Steed. "Ouch!"

"Genuine Swedish birch twigs," said His Nibs. "These Sauna baths are a must for anyone sweating out the results of high living. You'll feel marvellous in a few hours."

"Talking of high living," said Steed, "wouldn't you rather discuss whatever you want to discuss in the morning? It's one o'clock...."

"No, no," said General Lawrence.

The burly attendant pitched in again with the birch twigs until Steed was red and tingling all over his body. Steed bit his lip and waited until somebody spoke.

"I gather you're involved in this Fascist rebellion that's going on in Swindon?" said General Lawrence.

Steed winced. "Well - ouch - just a little. By Christ! Yes, I suppose - look, take a rest, will you? Yes, I was pottering about. Jesus!"

"I wouldn't bother," he said. "It's all rather insignificant, and I don't want our people involved. Let the police handle it. Otherwise we might look a little silly." He smiled loftily and waved to the burly attendant. "Lay on Macduff," he insisted. "I don't want it to look as if we put the whole weight of British counter-espionage into service whenever a colonel goes off his rocker."

"No, sir, but -"

"I know." He gestured the attendant to pitch in. "You have a private interest in showing Colonel Hayburn what's what. But don't let it get out of hand, Steed. You've been under a strain this last few weeks. You need to look after yourself. So I've booked a series of treatment here for the next fortnight."

"Ouch. But Mrs. Peel -"

"Don't worry, Steed. She won't become the dictator of Britain."

"I know." Steed sat up and glared at the man with the birch twigs. "If you do that again I'll punch you on the nose." He turned back to General Lawrence. "Mrs. Peel is on our side, sir. I think we ought to look after her. Those people have already killed one of our best women -"

"Rubbish. You're going soft, Steed. Women can look after themselves. They don't need you to protect them from anything. You're suffering from a frustrated paternal instinct." He drew himself up to his feet and prepared to go. "Just remember, Steed, this is no concern of ours."

"There are some slightly odd links with 1945. The man Harris -"

"By the way, Steed, how are you getting on with the memoirs?"

"I've given them up."

General Lawrence nodded to himself, waved to the wielder of the birch to continue with the punishment, and left.

As soon as he had gone Steed threatened to kill the fellow.

10

"To the dungeons with him"

When he reached Beriston there was a military checkpoint across the road and Steed had to draw up. The corporal who asked for his papers was an amiable youth who was following orders. He didn't really know what papers he wanted. "What about your driving licence?" he asked.

Steed showed his driving licence.

"Are you on manoeuvres?"

"You could say that, sir." He looked up in sudden alarm. "Is this your name?"

"Of course. John Steed. I live -"

"Would you mind waiting here a minute?"

The young corporal ran back into the wooden hut by the side of the road taking the passport with him. It seemed as if Steed was known. A moment later a sergeant marched out by the left and went through the drill of halting by the Bentley, falling out and climbing into the passenger seat.

"What do you want?" asked Steed.

"You're under arrest. Sir!"

Steed grinned. "And where do you want me to take you?"

"Is this your address?"

"Of course. That's my driving licence."

"That's where I want you to take me."

Steed shrugged and drove on.

The sergeant was a taciturn man who knew nothing and believed implicitly that a man arrested by the British army was thereby arrested. He didn't bother with guns or anything like that.

There were several army vehicles in the village itself and they passed two different squads of soldiers marching along the lanes.

When they reached the cottage he found a full military guard on the place. Steed saluted them limply and went down the front path. He put his hand in his pocket for the doorkey, but as he approached the door was opened from inside.

Colonel Hayburn was lounging by Steed's mantelpiece with a revolver in his hand. He smiled when Steed went in. "So you've come back at last. I was afraid you might have met with an accident in Bavaria. You know what it's like out there. Guns going off all the time. It's a dangerous place. Have you had

breakfast?"

"Yes thanks. I only take a cup of black coffee."

"Very wise." He turned to the escorting sergeant. "Take this man to the barracks dungeon and put him in chains. Mr. Harris will see him when he's been broken."

"Yes, sir!"

"I suppose you wouldn't mind telling me what the hell's going on?" asked Steed. "This tin pot rebellion of yours doesn't stand the slightest chance of succeeding-

Hayburn nodded. "I'm inclined to agree with you. But then, I'm afraid that's your fault. We shall have to execute you as the first enemy of the regime." The colonel had certainly got his spirit back. "I think I shall enjoy that. Sergeant, take him away."

This time Steed travelled in a special army van with an escort of two men. They seemed to know less of what was going on than Steed, but they felt pretty sure that Herr Harris was going to provide some fun before life reverted to the normal barracks tedium.

"You'll be thrown into gaol," said Steed.

"Not us, gov. We're following the orders of our superior officer. That's laid down in the Queen's Regulations."

When they reached Swindon Steed tried to make a fight of it, just to show that he couldn't be thrown into a dungeon at whim. But the two soldiers looked perilously keen to try out their guns, and Steed wanted to meet this man Harris anyway.

The dungeon was one of the bleakest places Steed had ever seen, and after two hours sitting in a corner with rusty chains round his wrists and ankles he decided it was time to begin the reversal. Colonel Hayburn had been given all the encouragement he was going to get.

Steed stretched out as far as he could towards the brazier. If he could reach one of those branding irons it would act as a fine crowbar to wrench open his shackles. He strained forward, but the burning pressure on his wrists was too much.

He sat back and thought again. He thought of the last time he had seen Hayburn in Einsiedeln, the white face at the wheel of the black Mercedes. With a sudden lurch Steed kicked out and tipped the brazier over. The effort almost made him scream with pain, but the nearest branding iron was just by his foot.

Steed worked busily for nearly half an hour, and one by one the shackles snapped. Then he picked up the brazier, returned the irons into the fire, and sat back against the wall with the chains in place. He felt in a better position to

enjoy the proceedings now.

Herr Harris was a distinctly odd man, he found. When he arrived, with five men and Colonel Hayburn in tow, Steed's first instinct was that he had seen him before. But Harris was old, a frail old man kept alive entirely by the fanaticism that showed in his eyes. He was boring as well. He delivered a very long speech about Germany and the decline of the west.

"Where's Mrs. Peel?" asked Steed.

"Do you know her?"

"No, but I heard about her on the news. I thought she might be more amusing than you."

Hayburn stepped forward and slapped his face.

"You're both insane," sighed Steed.

Harris chuckled. "Yes. I expect we are. Mrs. Peel is at Throgmorton Hall with one of my best men. She is packing."

"Oh. Are you all moving out?" asked Steed facetiously.

Harris nodded. "This little demonstration will have served its purpose by tonight. So Mrs. Peel and I are going back to Germany. It is the only place that appreciates firm leadership. And since you murdered my friend Neufeld I shall have to resume command myself."

Harris turned away abruptly, clutching his left hand to prevent it from shaking, and muttered, "All right. Have the man executed."

As soon as Harris had closed the door behind him, Hayburn bent over and asked Steed how he was feeling.

"Pretty groggy, old man. But I don't think that will last long." He smiled. "I'm surprised the old man won't be taking you to Germany. But then I suppose you are too incompetent. Bungling every job you are given to do."

Hayburn was standing over him now. "This is one job I shall be glad to do thoroughly."

As the man was reaching for his gun Steed rose sharply to his feet, cracked his head into Hayburn's jaw and took the gun in the same action. Before the other three soldiers could react Steed had them covered. "All right," he purred melodramatically, "don't move."

"Don't kill me," whined Hayburn. "I didn't mean to shoot that girl. I was aiming at you."

"You're a bloody bad shot."

Steed gestured to the three startled soldiers and told them to put Colonel Hayburn in the iron maiden. "It's all right," he assured them, "it only kills the man when you push the spikes through his eyes."

Colonel Hayburn was still whining, but his men had their spirit encouraged

and they put him gleefully into the iron maiden. It was a tight squeeze and the spikes that were permanently on the inside poked him rather uncomfortably. But they sat on the lid as if it was a crowded suitcase and eventually clamped it shut.

The whines turned to screams, but they were muffled screams. Steed laughed gently and tapped on the metal head. "Don't go away," he instructed. "The police will be down for you shortly. And if I ever see you again I'll shoot on sight."

Emma heard the words "Have the man executed," before she switched off the receiver and put the fountain pen back in her handbag. It was time for action.

The problem with Steed, she thought as she hurried out to the small white Lotus Elan, was that he could never keep out of trouble for long. He needed someone to look after him. She waved her two guards away.

"I'll be gone for two hours," she called. "Stay here until Herr Harris arrives and tell him to wait."

She covered the distance in twenty minutes flat, convinced with every minute that passed that Steed must be getting nearer to the gates of wherever they sent him. Up or down. She screeched into the barracks square, checked on the Bereta against her thigh, and went through into the guard room.

Two soldiers saluted her as she continued down into the dungeon. They were trying to tell her that someone was gone, but she knew that. She was only interested in the man who remained.

But the dungeon was empty. She stood surveying the empty room for several seconds trying to locate the whinnying sounds. Then she saw the iron maiden move.

"Steed!" She ran to the iron maiden and hauled open the catches. "What on earth have they done to you?"

Hayburn sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Steed?" He climbed out of the metal frame and stretched his muscles. "So you're a friend of Steed's, are you? I might have guessed."

He lurched suddenly at her, and as she ducked he grabbed her hair. He pulled violently and tried to lift his knee into her face. Fighting women was something that didn't test his nerves too much.

Emma grunted with pain, tried to throw him and failed. She murmured her apologies as she drew the Bereta and shot him. He was leaning over her and the bullet went straight through his heart. Emma had to slip out from under him pretty quickly to avoid spoiling her multi-coloured camel coat.

"I bet you'd have missed at twenty yards," said a voice behind her.

"Steed! I thought they were going to kill you."

"Well, they did think about it. But I changed their minds." He held out his hand. "Come up into the parade ground. You're just in time to see the end of a

rebellion." He led her up the stairs as if they were spending a pleasant evening at the theatre. "I was afraid you might miss the whole show. But I managed -"

"*You* managed?"

Steed laughed. "Well, I must admit that I failed to kill Colonel Hayburn."

11

Harris kaput

"If we hurry," said Steed, "we should reach that farmhouse before Harris leaves."

"Why don't we let him go," Emma asked. "I'm sure that when he reaches Germany he'll disrupt the whole right wing movement. He'd be as good as a secret weapon."

The parade ground was filled with swirling crowds of grey uniforms, officers shouting "Stand at ease!" and "Attention!" with nobody seeming to hear. The word mutiny had got around, and voices clamoured with excuses now that Hayburn was dead. Steed lowered himself gingerly into the tiny Lotus and allowed himself to be driven away from the scene. Let the army sort out its own muddle.

"I wonder why people are always plotting revolution and scheming for power," he reflected. The sun was shining this morning and the hills were green with corn. If only more people would take up gardening, or fishing.... "I don't understand people like Hitler."

Emma laughed. "I think it's time you abandoned that autobiography. It seems to be turning your mind."

He considered the matter. He had been relishing the phrase 'so, one is tempted to ask, what?' and he'd thought up a splendid footnote. 'The three corpses in Hitler's bunker were never identified, but we have reason to believe they were three stooges.' But perhaps it would all have to be sacrificed.

"Remind me on our way home," he said, "to stop at a hardware shop and buy a spade."

The farmhouse appeared to be deserted. Emma drove straight up to the house and they knocked on the door. "Do you know," Steed said as they waited, "I almost thought for a while that Harris was really Adolf Hitler."

Emma laughed.

"Perhaps you'd better climb through the window," Steed said eventually, "He clearly doesn't intend to answer the door."

He watched Emma swing gracefully on to the porch roof and disappear through an upstairs window. There were no gun shots and no sound of breaking furniture. Steed waited peacefully, plucked a green carnation for his button-hole and waved to a buxom young lady going past on a tractor.

"Come in," said Emma. She held the door open looking grim. "I've found something that should interest you."

"Splendid." He followed her into the house. "I've been thinking," he said. "Can you remind me to advertise for a good gardener instead?"

"Down in the basement."

Steed followed her into the concrete air raid shelter beneath the house. "My God," he murmured. He looked at the bodies on the floor. "This reminds me of the day when..." Three of the corpses were identical. They all looked exactly like Ludwig Harris.

"How do you account for that?" asked Emma.

"I don't," he pronounced. "But at least we have a triple certainty that he is dead."